
Monitoring the Implementation of CalWORKs: Welfare Reform and Welfare Service Provision in Los Angeles County, 1998



**Urban Research Division
Chief Administrative Office
County of Los Angeles**

CalWORKs Evaluation Team

Manuel Moreno, Ph.D., Principal Investigator

Michael Lichter, Ph.D., Senior Research Analyst

Elizabeth González, M.A., Support Research Analyst

John Hedderson, Ph.D., Senior Demographer

John Horton, Ph.D., Consulting Research Analyst

Linda Shaw, Ph.D., Consulting Research Analyst

With the assistance of

Jeff Henderson, M.U.P., Support Research Analyst

Ronald Hughes, Ph.D., Consulting Research Analyst

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**Urban Research Division (URD)
Chief Administrative Office (CAO)
County of Los Angeles**

David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer, CAO
Sharon Yonashiro, Assistant Administrative Officer, FAMB
Wayne Bannister, Assistant Division Chief, URD
Manuel Moreno, Project Director, URD

Evaluating CalWORKs in Los Angeles County

First in a series of reports on monitoring the effectiveness of CalWORKs implementation in Los Angeles County.

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The evaluation research described in this report was prepared for the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services.

Preface

This is the second report of the project *Evaluating CalWORKs in Los Angeles County*, a multi-year effort initiated by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to evaluate the impact of welfare reform in Los Angeles County. This project follows guidelines established in the CalWORKs Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan approved by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in April 1998. The plan has three major objectives: (1) measuring the success of welfare-to-work; (2) monitoring the effectiveness of program implementation; and (3) evaluating the impact of CalWORKs on family well-being and local communities. This report addresses the second part of the plan, monitoring program implementation, and focuses on the early implementation of CalWORKs in Los Angeles County.

This report summarizes the findings of our initial monitoring of the implementation of welfare reform in Los Angeles County. The report shows that the complexity of welfare reform in Los Angeles County has generated significant challenges for the Department of Public Social Services. We find in this report that DPSS has had to make major organizational and procedural changes to meet the demands of welfare reform. Lastly, the report finds that DPSS has made substantial progress towards the implementation of CalWORKs in Los Angeles County.

Manuel Moreno
Principal Investigator

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In late 1996, the U.S. Congress passed a welfare reform act that radically changed the federal provision of cash assistance to poor families with children. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) replaced the long-standing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and the related programs known as the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program and the Emergency Assistance (EA) program with the new Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF differs from its predecessor in several key ways, including: (1) a work requirement for aided parents, (2) a time limit on aid receipt, and (3) the devolution of implementation issues from the federal government to the states.

Responding to the federal mandate, the California legislature passed Assembly Bill 1542 (AB1542), also known as the Welfare to Work Act of 1997. AB1542 created the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, which subsumed both the old AFDC program and the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) welfare-to-work program. California's program differs from the programs implemented in most other states by continuing to support children when their parents do not comply with work requirements, by being less harsh on parents who do not find work quickly, and by penalizing parents who have additional children while receiving cash aid. Furthermore, CalWORKs includes services to support work that go well beyond what the federal law requires.

AB1542 also mandates that each county evaluate its progress towards meeting the goals of the law. To comply with the law, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted an evaluation plan in April 1998. The plan has three major parts: (1) measuring the success of welfare-to-work programs by tracking participant involvement in employment, job preparation, job training, and other related activities; (2) monitoring the effectiveness of program implementation and identifying best operational practices and needed improvements; and (3) evaluating the impacts of CalWORKs on family well-being and local communities through the tracking of outcomes such as child school performance, movement out of poverty, occurrence of domestic violence, and level of family stability.

This report addresses the second part of the plan, monitoring program implementation. The CalWORKs Evaluation Team in the Urban Research Division of the Chief Administrative Office of Los Angeles County gathered information about the first eight months of CalWORKs implementation—from April 1 through December 31, 1998—starting with discussions with Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) administrators about the program’s status. Next, we observed day-to-day activities in CalWORKs District Offices and in GAIN Regional Offices, familiarizing ourselves with their practices. Then, we put the bulk of the research effort into surveys of CalWORKs recipients, interviews with CalWORKs staff, and focus groups with welfare-to-work participants and welfare-to-work staff. Finally, we discussed our observations with DPSS administrators to clarify our understanding of departmental policies and learn of planned program changes and improvements.

Most of our field research took place in December 1998, and many of the program areas we examined at that time have since been changed and expanded by DPSS. In late 1998, CalWORKs was still very much a work in progress. Furthermore, the month of December 1998 was a stressful time for DPSS. Offices

were rushing to meet a state-mandated January 1, 1999, deadline to enroll all CalWORKs recipients subject to welfare-to-work requirements in the welfare-to-work program. In other words, this report is best understood as a representation of our initial observations, a snapshot of a program at a relatively early stage. Measuring program effectiveness is an activity that is usually left until implementation is complete. Early evaluation of this sort, however, gives the organization being evaluated an opportunity to try out new approaches and alter them where necessary before procedures become entrenched.

We observed while conducting this evaluation a genuine commitment within DPSS to innovate and to implement program changes that would make CalWORKs a success. Rapid shifts in departmental policies and procedures occurred as DPSS adjusted state guidelines to meet local realities, and therefore much of what we found to be true at the end of 1998 may no longer hold. DPSS continues to develop an organizational structure that will allow it to meet the many challenges it faces in meeting legislative mandates. Not until additional evaluations are conducted will we be able to determine what was transient and what is, at least in the short term, enduring. With these qualifications in mind, we have done our best to highlight promising practices that are emerging and to point out areas that, in late 1998, seemed to require additional attention.

Key Findings

We have organized our findings into four major areas:

- ***Informing Recipients and Participants***—One of the most important initial goals of DPSS has been to inform CalWORKs recipients and welfare-to-work

participants about how welfare has changed. Recipients and participants need to know what new services are available and what difficulties await them if they fail to respond to the incentives offered.

- ***Motivating Welfare-to-Work***—DPSS must help to motivate participants to begin moving along the path to self-sufficiency.
- ***Removing Barriers to Work***—Research shows that many welfare-reliant families have problems that must be addressed before full-time employment becomes a viable option. DPSS now offers an array of supportive services designed to remove barriers to work.
- ***Evolving as an Organization***—As DPSS Director Lynn W. Bayer has said, “DPSS is evolving, almost overnight, from a traditional welfare department to an employment support agency.” “Evolution” means both innovation and suffering “growing pains.”

Although our charge includes the identification of “best practices,” we refrain from using that label in this report. Distinguishing practices that “work” from those that do not, and verifying that one practice does in fact meet goals better than another requires that the practices be stable and instrumentation be precise. As DPSS steadily evolves and restructures its program, its practices change. Not enough time has passed for “best practices” to emerge and crystallize. In place of “best practices”, we use the term *promising practices*. A promising practice is one that has been identified as innovative and effective but has not been rigorously compared to alternative ways of meeting the same goals.

Informing Recipients and Participants

Recipients and Participants Found Staff Helpful

From our surveys of CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants, we found that overall, 93% felt the clerks greeting them at DPSS offices were helpful. Among CalWORKs recipients and new applicants, 84% reported that Eligibility Workers (EWs), the primary contact persons for recipients not involved in GAIN, were helpful, and able to answer their questions almost all (91%) of the time. Finally, new GAIN participants were satisfied with the helpfulness of GAIN Services Workers (GSWs) 93% of the time, and 92% had their questions answered.

Staff Communicated New CalWORKs Requirements

According to our survey of new GAIN welfare-to-work participants, most staff members were thorough in communicating program requirements. The new five-year lifetime limit on TANF cash aid was explained to 89%, while 86% were informed about the two year conditional limit on aid receipt (eighteen months for new recipients). The majority of non-welfare-to-work CalWORKs recipients also reported being told about program changes, though the proportions were somewhat lower; 60% had been informed about the five-year limit, and 56% about the two-year limit. Seventy-one percent indicated that they had been told about the requirement to document that their school-age children were regularly attending school. It is important to note, however, that our surveys did not measure how well recipients and participants actually understood program changes. We also did not ask about what our respondents had learned through other means used by DPSS to deliver information to clients, such as videotapes playing in their offices and regular informational mailings.

Motivating Welfare-to-Work

Participants Saw GAIN Staff and Offices as an Improvement

From its inception, GAIN has emphasized professionalism among its staff and tried to project a businesslike, corporate image in its offices. Participants in our focus groups responded well to the GAIN Regional offices, comparing them very favorably to the CalWORKs District Offices. They were particularly appreciative of the staff of the GAIN offices, who they felt treated participants with respect.

Participants Favorable Towards GAIN Orientation

In December 1998, when our surveys were conducted, most of the GAIN participants we interviewed had recently been through the GAIN Orientation and Appraisal. All of the participants told us that the Orientation staff was courteous, and almost all found the Orientation understandable (97%) and motivating (91%). In our focus groups, participants praised the Orientation. They reported that it raised their hopes for the future and prepared them to launch into welfare-to-work activities. They were especially appreciative of Orientation facilitators, who they found encouraging and supportive.

Participants Hopeful about Welfare-to-Work

In our focus groups, participants spoke enthusiastically about their desire to find employment and leave welfare. They cited the prospects of being better able to provide for their families, of being role models for their children, and of escaping the stigma of being welfare recipients as primary reasons that they look forward to participating in GAIN. Many participants had well-developed career aspirations, but were anxious about their ability to attain their goals within GAIN.

Participants Uncertain About Work First

Despite the optimism of most participants, a major theme that emerged from our interviews and focus groups was the worry that the *work first* emphasis of GAIN would leave participants stranded in dead-end low-wage jobs. Many felt that they needed additional skills training before being pushed into the job market. Their disagreement with GAIN was not about the goals of the program, but the means to achieve them.

Participants Desired Individual Attention

Responding to our surveys, both participants and workers told us that there was at times a poor fit between what GAIN required and what was in the apparent best interest of the participant. The clarification of GAIN Self-Initiated Program (SIP) policies, the addition of a literacy test to the Orientation, and the passing of a major enrollment hurdle may have subsequently lessened these concerns.

GAIN Meets Enrollment Deadline

DPSS reports that it met the January 1, 1999, state deadline for enrolling all of the remaining non-exempt adults who had been on aid continuously since March 31, 1998, into the GAIN welfare-to-work program. Although GAIN has been serving welfare recipients since 1988, its enrollment more than doubled between April 1, 1998, the official implementation date for CalWORKs welfare-to-work in Los Angeles County, and December 31, 1998. This constitutes a major accomplishment.

Removing Barriers to Work

Difficult Transition to New Child Care System

While DPSS had in the past assisted welfare-to-work and already-employed participants with child care costs, CalWORKs called for a significant revision of procedures. Before CalWORKs, employed recipients paid their child care costs and DPSS took this into account when calculating their grants. Under CalWORKs, however, most child care providers are paid directly. The transition to the new system was complicated by the confusing three-stage child care system introduced by AB1542. Under this system, the local welfare agency is in charge of only the first stage. Stages 2 and 3 are handled by Resource and Referral/Alternative Payment Program (R&R/APP) agencies approved by the California Department of Education. Aside from procedural issues, DPSS also had to adjust to a large increase in the number of participants needing child care services as a result of CalWORKs welfare-to-work requirements. DPSS has been making continuous adjustments to their child care system to address problems that have arisen.

Application Procedures Complex and Time-Consuming

Both staff and aided parents complained that the procedures for securing child care were complex and time-consuming. GSWs reported that the time they spent processing child care applications and troubleshooting child care difficulties impaired their ability to help participants with other welfare-to-work issues. For the parent, applying for funding required the correct completion of a long, complex form. The application was especially difficult for those who could not read English, since it was available in English only. (DPSS plans to make these forms available in several other languages.) Applicants who did not already have a provider chosen needed to find one before they could secure funding. Referrals were available from R&R/APP agencies, although

DPSS, following state law, allowed parents to use any provider they chose. DPSS has since taken steps to simplify and speed up the referral process by co-locating R&R/APP representatives in CalWORKs and GAIN offices.

Long Delays for Payment

A number of the participants surveyed in late 1998 reported long delays in the payment of child care providers. Surveys conducted with DPSS staff indicated that most delays occurred in invoice processing, often caused by incorrect invoice completion by the child care providers. The invoice form may have been too complex, especially for the unlicensed caregivers that recipients use most frequently. Although recipients are expected to begin participation in work-related activities immediately on entry into GAIN, participants reported that they frequently experienced long waits while their child care applications were being processed. Delays in late 1998 were also due to changes in DPSS invoice processing necessitated by the new federal and state laws.

Substance Abuse, Mental Health, and Domestic Violence Supportive Services Evolving

While estimates vary widely, there exists a consensus that a large proportion of welfare-reliant parents suffer from substance abuse, mental health, and/or domestic violence problems. As part of its new role in promoting employment for welfare recipients, DPSS has begun providing access to substance abuse, mental health and domestic violence supportive services. Although initial screening for supportive service needs occurs within DPSS, assessment and treatment have been contracted out, creating new needs for inter-agency coordination and monitoring.

Discomfort with Supportive Services Screening Questions

Staff and participants reported being uncomfortable with the questions used to screen for substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence problems. GSWs felt that the questions placed the participants on the defensive and erected barriers between them and the workers. GSWs also felt that asking the questions placed them in the position of being “social workers,” which they did not feel they were properly trained to be.

Promising Practice: Domestic Violence Team

We learned of a longstanding way of dealing with domestic violence cases in one CalWORKs District Office that exemplifies the concept of “promising practice.” Prominent signs throughout the office, including in restrooms, encourage victims of domestic violence to identify themselves to workers. The office has a Domestic Violence Team made up of EWs who received forty hours of training beyond that normally provided by DPSS. The team handles all domestic violence cases jointly. When members of the office staff identify potentially dangerous situations, the team takes steps to diffuse them. This high-intensity response contrasts to the normal situation at the time we conducted our research, where domestic violence cases were directed to a single specialized worker. DPSS has taken steps to ensure that domestic violence workers (and workers handling referrals for mental health and substance abuse services as well) are available at all times, first by training more staff members, and second by designating “backup” workers for each supportive service.

Promising Practice: In-house Clinical Assessment

GSWs and GSW supervisors who participated in our focus groups and surveys reported problems with contacting clinical assessment personnel and actual service providers, recommending that clinical assessors be stationed in GAIN offices. DPSS

has subsequently stationed mental health assessors in the small number of CalWORKs and GAIN offices where space has been available. Workers report that this is a “promising practice” because recipients find the office convenient and are more likely to appear for the assessment.

Evolving as an Organization

Los Angeles County DPSS has the third largest TANF caseload in the nation. Only the entire states of California and New York have larger caseloads. Large organizations, like big ships, take some time to turn around, and welfare reform, with its built-in timelines, incentives, and penalties, has been demanding a relatively rapid change in direction. Yet, DPSS has made the necessary change in direction, bringing its organizational structure into alignment with its new mission. In less than a year, its welfare-to-work caseload doubled, its inter-agency ties expanded dramatically, and its internal structure was reorganized. We find that as DPSS restructures and expands programs, it builds the collective capacity necessary to serve its clients in the post-welfare reform era.

Community Participation—A New Leaf

In keeping with the intent of the Welfare to Work Act of 1997, DPSS reached out broadly into communities throughout the County, seeking collaborators and soliciting input on how it should implement welfare reform. Several of the community work groups formed for initial planning continue to function.

DPSS has also been building cooperation with other organizations that have a stake in welfare reform. In April 1998, DPSS Director Lynn Bayer signed a Memorandum of Understanding forming a Welfare-to-Work coordinating group. The partnership, involving Private Industry Councils, the Employment Development

Department, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and others, has the purpose of promoting cooperation and collaboration, with the ultimate end of making welfare-to-work efforts succeed. This is a unique and *promising* practice.

Workers Overloaded and Underinformed

Loss of Experienced Eligibility Workers

While there has been a gradual decrease in the overall cash assistance caseload in Los Angeles County over the past few years, there has also been a rapid increase in the number of people participating in GAIN and its welfare-to-work activities. This rapid increase was met with a concomitant increase in GAIN staffing. In 1998, most of the new GAIN Services Workers were drawn from the ranks of experienced EWs. This left CalWORKs District Offices either understaffed or handicapped by an insufficient number of experienced personnel. Many EWs reported getting little or no formal training in program changes. With limited training, workers felt unable to properly serve participants. Cognizant of these problems, DPSS has taken a number of steps, including the initiation of a new “Training Academy” and the development of plans to greatly increase the size of its training staff.

GAIN Services Workers Overloaded

The state law that created CalWORKs also mandated that all aid recipients required to participate in welfare-to-work activities be enrolled in GAIN by January 1, 1999. GAIN workers reported that during the 1998 year-end rush to comply with the law, they had to handle enormous caseloads. They lamented that, unlike in the early years of the program, they were now unable to spend “quality time” with participants. Thus, they felt impaired in their ability to help participants meet welfare-to-work goals.

Job Satisfaction of Eligibility Workers Suffers

In our surveys and focus groups, GSWs uniformly reported that the GSW position was more rewarding than the EW position. Based on our surveys, Eligibility Workers appeared to agree. GAIN Services Workers are better educated, more generously rewarded, and are housed in more pleasant conditions than the bulk of CalWORKs Eligibility Workers. In addition, many Eligibility Workers felt that their workload was much larger than that of GAIN workers. The GAIN workers located in CalWORKs District Offices only serve participants who have been approved for CalWORKs since April 1, 1998. Consequently, the GAIN workers located in CalWORKs District Offices often appeared to be underutilized. Intake EWs, whose duties have increased significantly under CalWORKs, were especially dissatisfied with the disparity between their responsibilities and those of GSWs. As more GAIN cases accumulate in the District Offices, the perceived workload disparities should shrink considerably.

DPSS Moves to Improve Communication and Understanding

According to our research, a limited understanding of GAIN among EWs has been another source of friction between Eligibility and GAIN staff. Both EWs and GSWs agreed that EWs needed better GAIN training. The friction and the lack of knowledge seemed to stem, in part, from a lack of communication between GAIN and Eligibility staff, even regarding specific cases for which they shared responsibility.

In addition to the Training Academy mentioned previously, DPSS has taken a number of steps to address these problems. One large-scale project—a set of “Joint Staff Reviews”—brought together front line clerks, Eligibility Workers, and GAIN Services Workers from each CalWORKs and GAIN office. These sessions focused on communicating program goals and rules to all workers, answering staff questions, and collecting feedback for management. On a more routine basis, general program

information is often the subject at regular staff meetings, and the supervisors of Eligibility Workers have been given the responsibility of assuring that their EWs understand the GAIN welfare-to-work program.

In Sum

The federal and state welfare reform laws adopted in 1996 and 1997 made substantial changes in the provision of cash assistance to poor families. Welfare Reform instituted time limits and work requirements, ending AFDC and the indefinite entitlement of poor families with children to cash assistance. Despite the extent of the changes, the laws also demanded rapid implementation.

When we administered our surveys and conducted our focus groups in late 1998, implementation of CalWORKs in Los Angeles County was ongoing. Even today, most program areas are still undergoing development and refinement, though they are changing at a slower pace. As practices become more stable, finding and promoting “promising practices” will become more feasible. For a variety of reasons, problem areas have been easier to identify. The problems we discovered were in important areas of the CalWORKs program, including the GAIN welfare-to-work program; the provision of substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence supportive services; the provision of child care assistance; and the cooperation between CalWORKs and GAIN staff. All of these problems were known to DPSS and have been addressed.

I. INTRODUCTION

In late 1996, the U.S. Congress passed a welfare reform act that radically changed the federal provision of cash assistance to poor families with children. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) replaced the long-standing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program and the related programs known as the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program and the Emergency Assistance (EA) program with the new Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program. TANF differs from its predecessor in several key ways, including: (1) a work requirement for aided parents, (2) a time limit on aid receipt, and (3) the devolution of implementation issues from the federal government to the states.

Responding to the federal mandate, the California legislature passed Assembly Bill 1542 (AB1542), also known as the Welfare to Work Act of 1997. AB1542 created the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program, which subsumed both the old AFDC program and the Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) welfare-to-work program. California's program differs from the programs implemented in most other states by continuing to support children when their parents do not comply with work requirements, by being less harsh on parents who do not find work quickly, and by penalizing parents who have additional children while receiving cash aid. Furthermore, CalWORKs includes services to support work that go well beyond what the federal law requires.

The Welfare to Work Act of 1997¹ also mandates that each county evaluate its progress towards meeting the goals of the law. To comply with the law, the Los

Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted an evaluation plan in April 1998. The plan has three major parts: (1) measuring the success of welfare-to-work programs by tracking participant involvement in employment, job preparation, job training, and other related activities; (2) monitoring the effectiveness of program implementation and identifying best operational practices and needed improvements; and (3) evaluating the impacts of CalWORKs on family well-being and local communities through the tracking of outcomes such as child school performance, movement out of poverty, occurrence of domestic violence, and level of family stability.

This report addresses the second part of the plan, monitoring program implementation. The CalWORKs Evaluation Team in the Urban Research Division of the Chief Administrative Office of Los Angeles County gathered information about the first eight months of CalWORKs implementation—from April 1 through December 31, 1998—starting with discussions with DPSS administrators about the program’s status. Next, we observed day-to-day activities in CalWORKs District Offices and in GAIN Regional Offices, familiarizing ourselves with their practices. Then, we put the bulk of the research effort into surveys of CalWORKs recipients, interviews with CalWORKs staff, and focus groups with welfare-to-work participants and welfare-to-work staff. Finally, we discussed our observations with DPSS administrators to clarify our understanding of departmental policies and learn of planned program changes and improvements.

We suggest that this report is best understood as a representation of our initial observations, a snapshot of a program at a relatively early stage. While measuring program effectiveness is an activity that is usually left until implementation is completed, early evaluation gives the organization being evaluated an opportunity try out new approaches and alter them where necessary before procedures become entrenched.

Most of our field research took place in December 1998, and many of the program areas we observed at that time have since been changed and expanded by DPSS. The month of December 1998 was a stressful time for DPSS. Offices were rushing to meet a state-mandated January 1, 1999 deadline to enroll all CalWORKs recipients subject to welfare-to-work requirements in the welfare-to-work program.

In late 1998, CalWORKs was very much a work in progress. The slow pace of implementation can be partly attributed to the complexity of the process and the novelty of some program components. The state-mandated provision of "Diversion" payments provides a good example. AB1542 allows counties to "divert" applicants away from traditional cash assistance by offering them single lump-sum payments. However, Diversion is still in the planning stage in Los Angeles County. Implementation of Diversion will probably require a new step in the eligibility determination process and an increase in the discretion given to Intake Eligibility Workers. It will require new training for many public contact welfare workers and their supervisors, changes to procedure manuals, and possible modifications to two or more computer systems, all of which need to be ready at roughly the same time.

Beyond the technical difficulty of implementing welfare reform is the fact that new and vastly upsized programs represent a change in the mission of welfare agencies like DPSS. Welfare reform demands that DPSS change its focus from eligibility determination to service coordination, employment facilitation, and the design and development of programs that emphasize long-term family self-sufficiency. Another factor delaying implementation has been the need to wait for administrative guidelines from the federal and state governments. It is important to recognize that California adopted legislation implementing TANF later than did most other states. In addition,

Point of Information

Approved or Registered? Recipients or Participants?

When an applicant for CalWORKs assistance meets eligibility requirements and her (or his) request for cash aid is approved by DPSS, she/he becomes an *approved recipient*. The CalWORKs staff person she/he subsequently has most contact with is an *approved worker*. Receiving implies passivity. GAIN, which requires active participation, calls the recipients under its jurisdiction *participants*. Reflecting the CalWORKs goal of promoting work activities to all recipients, DPSS now officially calls all aided adults *participants*. We use the earlier terminology of *participant* and *recipient* in order to more easily distinguish between DPSS clients who are involved in CalWORKs welfare-to-work activities and those

the ambiguity of some provisions of the new state law caused delays at both the state and county levels.

We observed while conducting this evaluation a genuine commitment within DPSS to innovate and to implement program changes that would make CalWORKs a success. Rapid shifts in departmental policies and procedures occurred as DPSS adjusted state guidelines to meet local realities. Much of what we found to be true at the end of 1998 may no longer hold. DPSS continues to develop an organizational structure that will allow it to meet the many challenges it faces in meeting legislative mandates. Not until we conduct additional evaluations will we be able to determine what was transient and what is, at least in the short term, enduring. With these qualifications in mind, we have done our best to highlight promising practices that are emerging and to point out areas that, in late 1998, seemed to require additional attention.

We have organized our report into the following sections:

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- ***Introduction***—This section includes background on the federal and state laws and on the local context. It also includes an illustrative journey into the “welfare office” through the eyes of a new applicant.
 - ***Data Collection***—We based this report on data collected primarily through surveys and focus groups. This section details how we conducted our field research.
 - ***Informing Recipients and Participants***—One of the most important initial goals of DPSS has been to inform CalWORKs recipients and GAIN welfare-to-work participants about how welfare has changed. Recipients and participants need to know what new services are available and what difficulties await them if they fail to respond to the incentives offered.
 - ***Motivating Welfare-to-Work***—DPSS must help to motivate participants to begin moving along the path to self-sufficiency.
 - ***Removing Barriers to Work***—Research shows that many welfare-reliant families have problems that must be addressed before full-time employment becomes a viable option. DPSS now offers an array of supportive services designed to remove barriers to work.
 - ***Evolving as an Organization***—As DPSS Director Lynn W. Bayer has said, “DPSS is evolving, almost overnight, from a traditional welfare department to an employment support agency.”² “Evolution” means both innovation and suffering “growing pains.”
 - ***Conclusions***—A summary of principal findings.
 - ***Appendices***—Additional technical details about our surveys and focus groups, the membership list of our CalWORKs Evaluation Advisory Committee, a glossary of technical terms, a listing of the section of AB1542 that deals with evaluation, a

welfare reform timeline, and a table of the demographics of the DPSS April 1999 CalWORKs caseload.

Note that although our charge includes the identification of “best practices,” we refrain from using that label in this report. Distinguishing practices that “work” from those that do not, and verifying that one practice does in fact meet goals better than another requires that the practices be stable and instrumentation be precise. As DPSS steadily evolves, its practices change. Not enough time has elapsed for “best practices” to emerge and crystallize. In place of “best practices”, we use the term *promising practices*. A promising practice is one that has been identified as innovative and effective but has not been rigorously compared to alternative ways of meeting the same goals.³

Background: Ending Welfare as We Knew It

The Federal Welfare Reform Act of 1996

In the 1960s, social programs increased dramatically and poverty declined significantly, reaching an all-time low in 1972 in American society. Since 1972, poverty and income inequality have climbed, but popular support for public aid to the disadvantaged has sunk severely. The controversial charge that welfare *causes* poverty, popularized by authors like Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead, shaped the debate on America’s safety net during the 1980s and 1990s. Writings like William Julius Wilson’s *The Truly Disadvantaged*⁴ reinforced the public conception of the poor as an *underclass*, a dysfunctional breed apart. Authors like Murray and Wilson agreed that members of the underclass, whatever their reasons, had developed welfare-dependent lifestyles and

rejected the American commitment to hard work. A public resentful of having to support the non-working poor added to the political will for change.

In 1996, a bipartisan drive in Congress for welfare reform culminated in the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). PRWORA replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), making substantial revisions to the programs supporting poor American parents and their children.

Reflecting the widespread sentiments that welfare hurts the poor and that work will help heal them, President Clinton commented after signing the bill into law:

Today we are ending welfare as we know it, but I hope this day will be remembered not for what it ended, but for what it began: a new day that offers hope, honors responsibility, rewards work, and changes the terms of the debate so that no one in America ever feels again the need to criticize people who are poor or on welfare, but instead feels the responsibility to reach out to men and women and children who are isolated, who need opportunity, and who are willing to assume responsibility, and give them the opportunity and the terms of responsibility.⁵

Though PRWORA passed in 1996, aspects of the law reflected ideas that had already been put into practice in pilot or demonstration projects across the country. Accelerating through the 1980s and 1990s, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) began allowing states to modify their AFDC programs in ways that contradicted existing laws. Under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act, HHS had the authority to waive legal requirements on a case-by-case basis. During the Clinton Administration, HHS granted “waivers” for pilot projects in forty-three states, covering more than three-quarters of all AFDC recipients.⁶ Most of the waivers embodied the philosophy articulated by President Clinton: “We won’t have ended welfare as we know it until its central focus is to move people off welfare and into a job so that they

can support themselves and their families.”⁷ California was one of the most active states, with seven approved waivers.⁸ With only minor exceptions, PRWORA allows waivers to remain in place.

Still, PRWORA requires a number of reforms that many states had not put in place previously, including mandatory work for all non-exempt adult aid recipients, substantial penalties for non-compliance with work requirements, lifetime limits on aid receipt, and a set of supportive services for those with barriers to work. Under threat of financial penalties, states were required to quickly implement their new TANF programs.

California, the Welfare-to-Work Act of 1997, and CalWORKs

The authors of PRWORA did not fully take into account the degree to which implementing legislation would be controversial in each state. For example, political divisions within the legislature and between the legislature and the governor meant that California did not adopt a PRWORA-compliant plan until more than a year had elapsed since the U.S. Congress passed PRWORA.⁹

Although the implementation of TANF in California coincided with a cut in benefit levels, California still supports welfare recipients better than most other states. Relative to other states, California emphasizes work incentives over punitive measures.¹⁰ One way California encourages aid recipients to work is by allowing them to keep the first \$225 they earn each month, and fifty percent of what they earn beyond that.¹¹ Although federal law allows states to cut off aid to children of parents who fail to comply with work requirements, California does not do so. California intends to continue supporting the children of parents who reach the five-year lifetime limit on aid.¹²

The key goals of California’s AB1542, which mainly mirror those of the federal law, are shown in Table 1.

Unlike some smaller states, the state of California has left many of the details of TANF implementation to the counties. The Welfare-to-Work Act of 1997 established CalWORKs as the overarching TANF program for the state, but counties were left with substantial discretionary power—and responsibility—for many parts of the program.

Table 1. Key Goals of CalWORKs

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- 1) Reduce Child Poverty
 - 2) Reduce Welfare Dependence
 - 3) Promote Work by
 - a) Providing Incentives
 - b) Enforcing Penalties (Sanctions)
 - c) Promoting Work-Readiness
 - d) Teaching Basic Skills
 - e) Teaching Vocational Skills
 - f) Teaching Job Search Skills
 - 4) Remove Non-Skill Barriers To Work By Providing
 - a) Child Care Assistance
 - b) Transportation Assistance
 - c) Domestic Violence Services
 - d) Substance Abuse Treatment Services
 - e) Mental Health Treatment Services
 - f) Ancillary Expenses
 - 5) Promote Economically Independent Families
 - a) Promote Job Stability And Wage Growth
 - i) Provide Post-Employment Services
 - b) Promote Marriage
 - i) Reduce Non-Marital Births
 - ii) Promote 2-Parent Families
 - 6) Avoid Negative Outcomes
 - a) Decreases In Child Well-Being
 - b) Increases In General Assistance
 - c) Increases In Domestic Violence
-

Source: AB1542, 1997

Point of Information

Population Served by DPSS

Although a large proportion of the caseload served by DPSS are aided under CalWORKs, DPSS also administers a number of other programs. In December 1998, DPSS aided 1.5 million people who belonged to 826,000 cases. DPSS has over 11,000 employees to serve this large caseload.¹ Just 29% of the cases handled by DPSS in December 1998 were CalWORKs cases. Close to half (45%) of the persons aided by DPSS were in CalWORKs cases, however, because CalWORKs cases tend to include more persons than those served by other programs. Almost half of the cases served by DPSS receive only Medi-Cal benefits (47%), but they account for just over one-third (38%) of all persons aided.

Number of Cases and Persons Aided by DPSS, December 1998

Program	Persons Aided		Cases Aided	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
CalWORKs-FG	524,842	35%	197,967	24%
CalWORKs-U	144,246	10%	39,174	5%
CalWORKs (All)	669,088	45%	237,141	29%
General Relief	59,248	4%	57,899	7%
Refugee Relief Program	253	0%	212	0%
In-Home Supportive Services	89,262	6%	89,262	11%
Food Stamps Only	103,417	7%	53,491	6%
Medi-Cal Only	565,886	38%	387,683	47%
Total Aided	1,487,157	100%	825,689	100%

Source: Department of Public Social Services Statistical Report, January 1999.

Implementing CalWORKs in Los Angeles County

With 237,000 CalWORKs cases¹³ as of December 1998, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services provides cash aid, employment support, and ancillary services to more families than do most states (see Appendix I for caseload demographics). In addition to its unusually large size, the Los Angeles County caseload is also unique in its diversity. CalWORKs recipients in Los Angeles are ethnically and linguistically diverse and include a high proportion of non-English-proficient¹⁴ immigrants

and refugees. Furthermore, the low-wage sector of the local economy has become increasingly prominent over the past two decades, making movement from plentiful low-wage jobs to relatively scarce living-wage jobs a challenging task for job specialists dealing with GAIN participants.

Table 2. CalWORKs Implementation Plans Approved and Scheduled to be Approved by Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

CalWORKs Implementation Plan	Target or Approval Date
Budget and Staffing	2/3/98 Approved
Facilities (Part 1)	2/3/98 Approved
Facilities (Part 2)	3/10/98 Approved
Domestic Violence	3/31/98 Approved
Mental Health/Substance Abuse	3/31/98 Approved
Child Care	4/14/98 Approved
Performance Outcomes	4/14/98 Approved
Child Care Capacity Building	5/12/98 Approved
Los Angeles County Collaborative Regional Welfare-to-Work Grant Program	6/9/98 Approved
Post-Employment Services	6/9/98 Approved
Communication and Outreach	6/16/98 Approved
Transportation	6/15/99 Approved
Community Service	Target Date: 7/99
Reclassification Actions	Target Date: 8/99
Long-Term Family Self-Sufficiency	Target Date: 11/99
Diversion	To Be Determined
Job Creation	To Be Determined

Source: Department of Public Social Services¹⁵

The state of California gave Los Angeles County just four months to submit to the California Department of Social Services an implementation plan, and seven months—from August 22, 1997, when AB1542 was approved, until April 1, 1998—to have its CalWORKs program substantially in place. As required by AB1542, DPSS began a planning process that solicited input from broad sectors of the local community and this changed the way DPSS has traditionally planned programs by involving community groups. For example, DPSS sponsored twelve community planning forums during October 1997,¹⁶ and presented to the public a semi-final draft of the County’s detailed plan on December 10, 1997. As it has completed implementation plans for specific areas of CalWORKs, DPSS has submitted those plans to the Board of Supervisors for approval (see Table 2).

In creating its own CalWORKs program, DPSS exercised its option to contract out many of the required services. Although the main responsibility for welfare-to-work activities now lies with the GAIN Division of the Bureau of CalWORKs within DPSS, the initial orientation of new participants into GAIN has been contracted out to the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). LACOE also handles Job Club, the first GAIN “component” to which most participants are assigned. The responsibility of finding child care providers and paying those providers has been, for the most part, contracted out to community agencies. The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health provides mental health services under contract, and substance abuse services are also provided under contract with the County Department of Health Services.

Subcontracting services has allowed DPSS to offer those services without developing its own expertise in new areas. On the other hand, outsourcing has greatly increased the importance for DPSS of interagency cooperation and coordination. Ensuring that contractors serve participants with adequate quality and care is a general

problem that other social service agencies have encountered.¹⁷ Ensuring that participants have easy access to services is another concern. DPSS has made a priority of creating a seamless interface so that participants do not feel they have to negotiate a jumble of unfriendly bureaucracies. The “one-stop” service center has been adopted as a model.

As of late 1998, the one-stop goal was far off. For example, in December 1998, an unemployed father who had been on assistance since 1997 would have submitted his monthly documentation to a CalWORKs District Office, visited his GAIN Services Worker at a GAIN Regional Office, and attended Job Club at a third office. If he finished Job Club without finding full-time employment, he would be sent to a vocational assessor’s office, and from there perhaps referred for basic education at another location. If he reported an alcohol problem, he would have been referred for clinical assessment at one provider’s office, and, depending on the diagnosis, referred to a second provider’s office for treatment. At the very least, the DPSS web of subcontractors resulted in an extensive set of commutes for the participant.

State law required that most welfare recipients subject to welfare-to-work requirements be inducted into welfare-to-work programs by the first day of 1999. Although GAIN has been serving welfare recipients since 1988, its enrollment more than doubled between April 1, 1998, the official implementation date for CalWORKs welfare-to-work in Los Angeles County, and December 31, 1998. This constitutes a major accomplishment. It should be noted, however, that for many GAIN participants, their “enrollment” means only that they received a letter informing them that they are now in GAIN and are expected to attend GAIN Orientation at a specific place, date, and time.

CalWORKs: A Walk-through

Welfare recipients are, by definition, poor, but it should be noted that not all poor people receive public assistance. CalWORKs is a program providing cash assistance to families, but only to families that have eligible children. Almost all children living in families that meet statutorily-defined income limits are eligible for assistance, but their caretakers—parents, grandparents, or other relatives—may not be (see Table 3 on page 18).

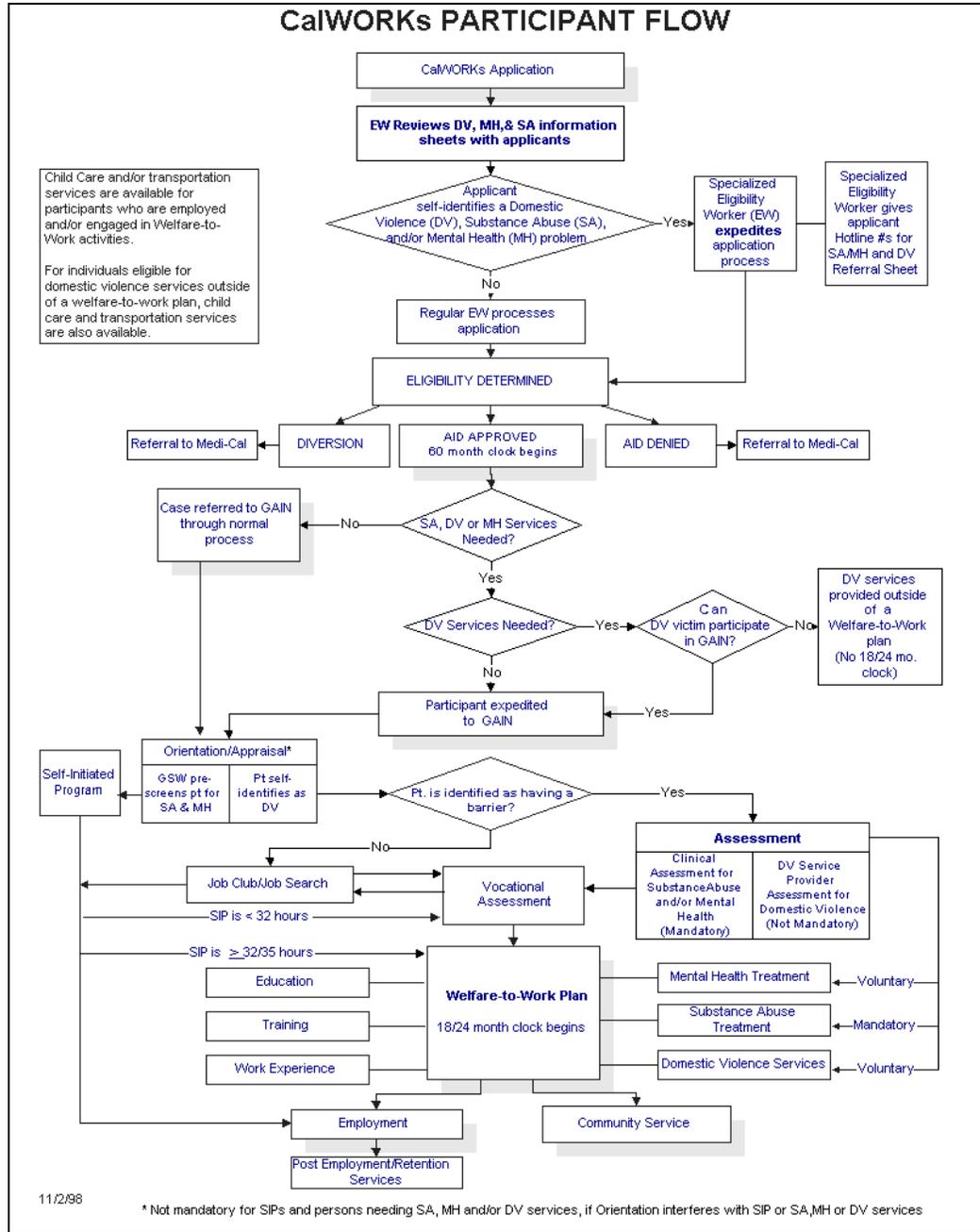
The following section tracks a fictional CalWORKs applicant, who we will call Louise,¹⁸ from her decision to apply for aid through her entry into GAIN and beyond. Figure 1 below shows a schematic outline of Louise’s possible paths through CalWORKs.

When Louise applied for aid in November 1998, she was 27 years old, had a 10-year-old son and a 2-year-old daughter. In September, she had been laid off from an \$8/hour cleaning job at a private hospital, and, after spending a month unsuccessfully looking for work, had subsequently moved in with her retired Aunt Vera. In late October, she found a minimum wage job at a corner market, but only for six to twelve hours a week. Aunt Vera had few resources to assist Louise with, and so by mid-November Louise had decided to apply for welfare.

When Louise arrived at the Norwalk CalWORKs District Office at 10 A.M., it was already quite crowded. At the office, she and her daughter Nora—her son Mark was in school—passed through a metal detector and were looked over by a security guard before being instructed to wait in line to see a clerk. After waiting for some time, she reached a window and the clerk gave her an informational form to complete. When Louise finished filling out the form and returned it to the clerk, the clerk directed her to a

waiting area. The clerk then created a file that she placed in a queue for the first available Intake Eligibility Worker.

Figure 1. Participant Flow, CalWORKs and GAIN



Source: County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Social Services, 1998

Note: "Pt." is an abbreviation of "participant."

Table 3. Who May Be Eligible for CalWORKs Assistance?

	Potentially Eligible? ¹
Caretaker adults living with related children under 19	Yes
Undocumented immigrants, adults or children	No
US-born children of undocumented parents	Yes
Legal permanent residents ²	Yes
Fleeing felons, drug felons	No
Children living with an adult felon	Yes
Adults who have had five years of welfare assistance starting 1/1/98	No
Children living with an adult who had been assisted for more than five years starting 1/1/98	Yes
Adults who refuse to comply with CalWORKs work requirements ³	No
Children of non-compliant adults	Yes

Source: AB1542, 1997; County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Social Services

¹Families can only be eligible if their income is sufficiently low and the value of family assets such as savings accounts, real estate, and automobiles fall under specific thresholds. Many families ineligible for CalWORKs assistance could be eligible for general assistance, food stamps, and/or Medi-Cal. Note that parents under age 18 who are living independently and who have not finished high school will be enrolled in the CalLEARN program.

²Not eligible for some other forms of federal aid.

³Excluding those who are not required to participate in welfare-to-work activities because of old age, presence of a child under one year old, etc.

DPSS divides Eligibility Workers into two main categories: (1) “Intake EWs,” who handle new cases; and (2) “Approved” EWs, who handle ongoing cases. There are several kinds of “Approved workers” but two examples are the “earned income”

Point of Information

CalWORKs-FG and CalWORKs-U

Under AFDC, eligibility requirements for two-parent families were much stricter than those for single parent families. The 1996 welfare reform eliminates most of the distinctions between single- and two-parent families for purposes of eligibility. The main remaining difference in California is that to be eligible for CalWORKs-U, the family's primary wage earner must have been unemployed or have been working less than 100 hours per month for at least four weeks prior to applying for CalWORKs assistance. In November 1998, DPSS aided 197,592 families (83% of the all CalWORKs cases) under the FG ("family group") program of CalWORKs. Another 39,232 families (17% of the total) were aided under the U ("unemployment") program. Most families aided under FG are headed by a single parent.

EWs, who handle approved cases in which an aided adult is working; and the "specialized" workers who handle specific kinds of cases, e.g., those requiring supportive services.

In the waiting room, Louise watched Nora play with the child of another applicant, occasionally devoting some attention to an informational video playing in one corner of the waiting room. After a wait of about an hour, the Intake Eligibility Worker called Louise into a small room where the worker asked her questions about her finances, her living arrangements, and her children, among other things. The EW gave Louise several more forms to complete. Before she began filling out the additional paperwork, the EW began to ask Louise a set of questions intended to determine if she was an abuser of alcohol or other drugs or if she had mental health problems that might need treatment. Louise answered "no" to all of the questions. The EW gave Louise a piece of paper that described domestic violence, and she asked Louise if she had a domestic violence problem. Louise said "no." If she had said "yes" to any of these questions, she would have been referred to an EW with special training in the appropriate area. If Louise had identified a domestic violence problem, or if the EW strongly suspected that there was a domestic violence problem, the specialized EW would have assessed the situation and possibly taken action, e.g., by referring Louise to a shelter.

Louise was unable to complete the forms on the spot—they required information and documentation that she was not carrying with her. The Intake EW then scheduled a return appointment with Louise, and Louise and Nora left the office, having been there for less than two hours.

Louise might have had a longer day in the office if she had, for instance, first applied for food stamps only, and then, because she qualified for cash aid, had been sent back to apply for CalWORKs. She might also have had a long wait in store if she had an emergency situation and was identified as having an “immediate need.” If Louise had appeared to a Screener (a special EW) or Intake EW to be eligible for aid, and if she had certified that an emergency situation existed, such as pending eviction, imminent utility shutoff, or complete lack of food, she might have been able to get an “immediate need” payment—after a wait.

A few days after her first appointment, Louise returned for her second appointment. She was able to complete most of her paperwork, but she had unfortunately forgotten one required piece of documentation. She had to return again. The third time through, everything was finished, and the Intake EW submitted her forms to an information worker (a clerk). At this point, the Intake EW took some time to explain CalWORKs to Louise, mentioning the availability of welfare-to-work services and pointing out the new time limits on aid receipt.

Since Louise did not say she had an “immediate need,” and because her case was not processed for expedited Food Stamp services—in either case the application would have been processed immediately—the Eligibility Worker told her that she would hear within thirty days about her family’s eligibility. The information worker entered Louise’s forms into the computer system, and it eventually determined that she was, indeed, eligible for aid. When the computer calculated her grant, it took into account

Point of Information

the \$451 Louise earned in the previous month in her job at the market. The computer generated a letter to inform Louise that, in December, Louise would receive for herself and her two children a cash grant of \$498, food stamps worth \$285, and a Medi-Cal card.

Louise's case was then assigned to an "Approved file." For DPSS, a "file" is a bundle of cases that have similar characteristics. Since she was working part-time, Louise's case would go into an Earned Income file. Although most Approved files are handled by a team of Approved EWs, Earned Income files are usually handled by just one Earned Income worker per file. As long as Louise delivered her monthly financial statement (CA-7) on time, her situation did not change, and no difficulties arose, she would not need to meet her Earned Income EW for nearly a year. If she remained on aid for more than a year, at the end of each year she would have to report to DPSS for a "redetermination" appointment.

Poverty, Public Assistance, and Self-Sufficiency

When is a family officially considered poor? How much income can they have and still be eligible for public assistance? When are they considered self-sufficient? Let us attempt to answer these questions for Louise's family (see body of report), a family with one parent and two minor children.

To answer the first question, poverty thresholds are established for a variety of family types by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. In 1998 (all the thresholds and limits we use here were current in October 1998), Louise's family would have been considered poor if the family's total annual income was at or below the official poverty threshold of \$13,133. That translates into \$1,094 per month, or \$7.89 per hour for someone working 32 hours per week—the number of hours required for a single parent receiving CalWORKs cash assistance.

The second question was about income limits and CalWORKs eligibility. To successfully apply for CalWORKs, any income Louise received during the preceding month—from child support, for example—would have to total less than \$775. If she earned any income during the month, she would be allowed to deduct \$90 for work-related expenses, even if she earned less than \$90. (The family would also have to meet resource limits and other eligibility criteria.) This means that Louise's family income would have to be under the poverty line of \$1,094 per month for her to be eligible to start receiving aid.

The third question, concerning when Louise's family could be considered to be self-sufficient, is more a matter of perspective than of fact. Family self-sufficiency can be defined in a number of ways. We suggest that, at a minimum, self-sufficiency means being able to meet basic needs without resort to public assistance. The official poverty line is a widely-used yardstick to measure whether family incomes are adequate to meet family needs. For Louise, she would need to have a total income of more than \$1,094 monthly to be above the poverty line. Another yardstick we might use is the income at which a family becomes ineligible for further public assistance. Because of the work incentives built into the way cash grants are calculated, Louise could earn up to \$1,447 monthly—the equivalent of \$10.44 per hour for 32 hours a week—before she would cease receiving CalWORKs cash aid. Note, however, that even at

At her redetermination appointment, Louise would be asked to present her current financial situation in depth, providing information and documentation that goes beyond that which she must supply monthly. Redetermination is not the only time that eligibility may be recalculated, but it is the most intensive time. Redetermination is also a time for information dissemination; the EW would tell Louise then about important changes in the program.

During the month in which Louise's aid was approved, however, her personal and family information would have been entered into DPSS computer systems. The computer systems handling her case would have recognized that she needed to be sent

to the CalWORKs welfare-to-work program—GAIN. There was no obvious reason for Louise to be exempted from welfare-to-work requirements—she was not ill or elderly or caring for a newborn—so she needed to participate in GAIN. Louise soon received a letter in the mail informing her that she needed to attend a GAIN Orientation and Appraisal at her CalWORKs District Office. Had she been on aid during March 1998, she would have been sent instead to a GAIN Regional Office, an office that might have been distant from her accustomed CalWORKs District Office.

California law requires that all aided adults (with some exceptions detailed below) participate in welfare-to-work activities with the initial goal of becoming employed and the long-term goal of attaining economic self-sufficiency. Once Louise entered the welfare-to-work program, she had to conduct a job search which would end either when an employer offered her a job, or after three weeks.¹⁹ She would have to accept any job offered to her unless she could show good cause for refusing it (e.g., she was physically unable to perform the work, or travel time was prohibitively long).

If Louise had been an ongoing recipient, she could have called her EW to get more details, and the EW would tell her that she could be reimbursed for transportation expenses if she asked. Louise might also have called the GSW named on her appointment letter and learned the same thing. If, as many people do, she had ignored that first letter, Louise would have soon gotten another, somewhat more urgent message telling her to attend a second session. She might have gotten several letters before attending one or being ruled “non-compliant.” If found non-compliant, she would have to meet with her GAIN Services Worker or face the loss of her personal benefits.²⁰

Louise’s introduction to GAIN was a full day of activities.²¹ She decided to leave her daughter Nora with Aunt Vera. Her appointment took her to the CalWORKs District Office at 8:00 A.M. There, she checked in with a clerk and waited for a short

while. If she had been called down to a GAIN Regional Office, she would have been joining up to forty other new GAIN participants, but at the District Office numbers are usually much lower. While the Orientation sessions take place in the GAIN (or CalWORKs) office, they are run by men and women employed by LACOE under contract with DPSS. LACOE is a public sector organization that provides a variety of educational services. The Orientation session combines information about GAIN and its requirements with self-help advice and motivational activities. Although the basic content of the Orientation is fixed, participants tell us that the actual experience varies quite a bit depending on the personality and philosophy of the facilitators.

The Orientation session lasted roughly from 8:00 A.M. to noon, and then, after lunch from 1:00 P.M. to 2:00 P.M. After Orientation, Louise returned to the waiting area until called by her assigned GSW, a man named Carlos. Her wait was quite short. She followed Carlos to a standard corporate-type cubicle, and he then began the *Appraisal*.

Carlos began by going over key GAIN requirements with Louise. He gave her a sheet of paper titled “Welfare to Work Plan: Rights and Responsibilities” to read. The sheet introduced the CalWORKs welfare-to-work program and informed Louise that, as a welfare-to-work participant, she had the right to, for instance, “Receive direction and support from the county to help you improve your ability to get a job.” One of her responsibilities, according to the sheet, was to “Accept a job if you get an offer unless you have a good reason not to.” Carlos answered Louise’s questions about the Rights and Responsibilities form, and then asked her to sign it, confirming that she had read and understood it.

After Louise signed the form, Carlos asked her about her current work situation. Louise explained about her job at the market, the unstable job she had found

after losing her hospital position. If she had made a request for an exemption from GAIN, Carlos would have handled that at this point. Louise did not ask, and was not, in any event, eligible for an exemption. Since she was only working a few hours weekly, Carlos was required to assign Louise to a welfare-to-work “activity” or “component.”

If a participant is over age twenty, under age sixty, not caring for a newborn infant, and not suffering from a serious long-term illness or disability, she is unlikely to be exempt from participation in GAIN (see Table 4 for a list of exemptions). If she has a medical problem, she will need to return to the GAIN office with proof of her condition. If she feels that she cannot participate in welfare-to-work activities for some other reason, e.g., she needs to care for a child with special needs or a chronically ill relative, she will again have to return with documentation, and her GSW may need to make a judgment call.

Table 4. Exemptions from CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Requirements

May Be Exempt from Welfare-to-Work Requirements if But ...
Under Age 16	(Always Exempt)
Ages 16 through 18, living with parents	Must be in school full time
Age 60 and over	(Always Exempt)
Pregnant	Must be medically unable to work
Primary caretaker of child under 1 year old	This exemption only allowed once
Primary caretaker of child under 6 months old	(Always Exempt)
Primary caretaker of ill family member	Need for care must be certified
Incapacity	Must be medically unable to work
Part of an experimental control group	Must have been randomly selected for study
Supportive services unavailable	Child care or transportation must be unavailable

Source: AB1542, 1997; County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Social Services

Note: Exemptions may be temporary or permanent.

GAIN is a *work first* program—it is a GAIN principle that ultimate success depends on moving a participant into employment as quickly as possible. Education, whether of a remedial or a vocational variety, is considered by GAIN as something to be added to a participant’s routine after he or she has settled into a job, as part of a package of Post-Employment Services. The participant may ask to be allowed to pursue a Self-Initiated Program (SIP) of education, but only if the participant began the program prior to entry into GAIN. SIPs are educational or vocational programs that must be certified to lead to stable employment. In order to maximize the likelihood that participants will be able to support themselves when they complete a SIP, GAIN normally only approves SIPs that lead to what they call “demand occupations.”

Demand occupations are high growth, living wage occupations that have been identified by the U.S. Department of Labor. As with other welfare-to-work activities, hours spent on SIPs can only substitute for employment for 18 to 24 months. That is, the participant could continue in his or her program after reaching the 18/24-month time limit, but would have to be concurrently employed or performing community service for the required 32 or 35 hours per week.

Louise was, like most new GAIN participants, referred to Job Club as her first GAIN component. Carlos explained where she needed to go for Job Club, and when she was expected to be there. He asked her if she needed assistance with transportation to the Job Club site. She did, and she was given a short-term bus pass.

Next, Louise was asked about her child care needs. As noted above, CalWORKs pays for child care assistance as a means of removing barriers to work. In general, only care for children under the age of 13 will be paid for. State law allows participants to choose between “license-exempt” child care providers and state-licensed providers. License-exempt child care providers are often family or friends of the recipient who charge nominal rates and care for the children either in the participant’s home or in their own. Schools and recreation centers may also become license-exempt providers, however. Licensed providers may be non-profit or for-profit, educational or merely care-taking. Louise was interested in placing her son in an after-school program, leaving Nora with Aunt Vera.

Carlos gave Louise the telephone number of a Resource and Referral/Alternative Payment Program (R&R/APP) agency. The R&R/APPs are non-profit agencies under contract with DPSS and with the state to provide participants with referrals to licensed child care providers and to handle payments to the providers. Carlos also gave Louise a child care application form to complete. The form was in

English only—not a problem for Louise. Once the form was complete, Carlos reviewed it, had Louise correct a small error, and then entered her information into GEARS (the GAIN Employment and Activity Reporting System). After Louise left, Carlos forwarded the form to his supervisor for further processing. Once the application was approved and Louise found a convenient provider, the provider would be required to submit standard invoices to the DPSS Finance Division each month in order to secure payment. (The procedure has changed somewhat since last December.)

During the Appraisal, Carlos screened Louise for domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties, using the same standard questions that were asked by the Intake EW. If she had told Carlos that she needed assistance, or that she was already receiving assistance for any of these problems, he would have immediately referred her to a Clinical Assessment. In some offices, there are currently Mental Health assessment specialists, but in most cases the GSW would have called a specialist to arrange an appointment. If the assessor determined that Louise needed services in order to be able to work, then GAIN would have funded the services.

The week after her Appraisal, Louise attended her first day of Job Club. Job Club is an activity which, like the Orientation, is run by LACOE. It is a program intended to prepare participants for job search and for life in the workplace. Half of each day in Job Club was spent in classes on topics like resume writing, while the other half was spent on supervised job search. Participants must be punctual or they may be sent home and asked to return for an additional day. To prepare participants for the world of work, they are required to wear appropriate business attire. Since Louise did not have enough money on hand to buy appropriate clothes, she asked for and, through the Ancillary Expenses policy, was given a small sum for shoes, a skirt and a blouse.

She came each day for three weeks, making calls, taking the bus to locations throughout the County to make applications, and going on interviews. At the end of three weeks, she had only received one job offer, and because the one-way travel time from her home was over an hour, Job Club allowed her to turn it down.

The term “welfare-to-work activities” refers to a range of possibilities that go well beyond Job Club and SIPs. When Louise completed Job Club but had not yet found a job, she was given a Vocational Assessment. She was sent to the office of a specialist who reviewed Louise’s skills and work history. The goal of the Vocational Assessment was to identify the needs that would have to be addressed before Louise could successfully find work. The assessment culminated in a referral to another GAIN “component.” Louise was referred back to Job Club for two more weeks of supervised job search. Others might enter controlled “work experience” programs—non-waged “jobs” that serve to acclimate participants to the world of work. Still others might be assigned to remedial education or a brief vocational program.

Participants who secure employment paying at least minimum wage for at least 32 hours a week (35 hours a week combined for two-parent families) are expected to stay in GAIN for at least three months. If they remain stably employed over that period, they may leave or they may instead opt for post-employment services (PES). PES offers them a career assessment and supports efforts to move into jobs with higher pay. Many participants who are employed still do not make enough money to move off cash aid. To assist with job retention, those who do are still eligible for PES for up to twelve months.

Those who do not find full time work but who otherwise comply with GAIN regulations may move from component to component within GAIN for up to two years.

If they are still not working the required number of hours at that point, they will most likely be assigned to unpaid “community service” employment.

GAIN participants often fail to comply with program requirements. Some breaches of program rules, like lateness to Job Club, result in inconveniences like having to return for an additional day. Other instances can have consequences that are more serious; if participants do not make good on their non-compliance by meeting with their GSW and forging a new compliance agreement, they are “sanctioned.” This results in a cut to their family grant.

In mid-January 1999, during Louise’s second term in Job Club, Aunt Vera became ill. Since Aunt Vera was now bed-ridden, Louise had to spend a good deal of time taking care of her. In her weakened condition, Aunt Vera could no longer watch Nora while Louise was away at Job Club. In order to continue her in the welfare-to-work program, Louise would have to find a new child care provider, at least temporarily. Louise had been frustrated with her lack of success in finding a job, and, instead of asking her GAIN worker for assistance, she ceased attending Job Club. Depressed about her situation, Louise did not respond to letters urging her to meet with her GSW—Carlos—to resolve the situation. The result was that Louise’s welfare check for March was cut by almost one-third: she was *sanctioned*. Her check for April was also reduced. When she met with Carlos in April, she was able to re-enter GAIN, restoring her aid check. Had this been Louise’s second or third sanction, however, she would have had to wait three or six months, respectively, to re-enter GAIN and have her aid restored.

Louise supports the goals of CalWORKs. She wants to be able to support her children better than she is able to between public assistance and the small amount she earns at the grocery store. If CalWORKs works as advertised, it will help her find a

full-time job, even if it is minimum wage, and help her, over time, move up into a living wage job. Louise is unsure if this will work, but she will try.

II. DATA COLLECTION

Our CalWORKs Evaluation Team took a two-pronged approach in order to learn from CalWORKs recipients and staff, and GAIN participants and staff how various parts of CalWORKs have been functioning. During the latter part of 1998, we fielded surveys of recipients, participants, and staff. Surveys are best for reaching a moderate or large number of people, useful for learning about how common an experience or opinion is, but then provide little information about *hows* and *whys*. To deepen our knowledge about CalWORKs and GAIN, we also conducted focus groups, group discussions that are good at revealing *hows* and *whys* but that are not so good at estimating how widespread experiences or opinions are. The focus groups were also conducted in late 1998. What our survey respondents and focus group members told us represents their opinions.

Surveys

As part of our charge to evaluate CalWORKs, we conducted surveys of the following groups of people involved with the program: (1) CalWORKs recipients not in GAIN, (2) GAIN participants who have just finished Orientation, (3) GAIN participants who are in Job Club, (4) CalWORKs Eligibility Workers, (5) CalWORKs Eligibility Worker Supervisors, (6) GAIN Services Workers, (7) GAIN Services Worker Supervisors, and (8) CalWORKs Deputy District Directors. Survey interviews of recipients and participants were conducted in both Spanish and English. Our interviews included ratings of how helpful CalWORKs and GAIN staff were, how well the staff were disseminating information about welfare reforms, and the degree to which child care,

transportation, and other supportive services were available to recipients/participants (see Appendix B). Questions on perceptions of job availability, qualifications, and work history were asked of all recipients and participants. GAIN participants were also asked about the quality and helpfulness of the Orientation or, where applicable, the Job Club.

Goals for the staff interviews included determining how smoothly welfare reforms were being implemented and identifying areas of strength and weakness in the CalWORKs and GAIN programs. DPSS staff were also asked about their perceptions of DPSS clients, and about changes in their job duties under welfare reform. All participants and staff were asked to supply basic demographic information, including age, race and ethnicity, years of education, age, and languages spoken.

We interviewed participants and staff at all five GAIN Regional Offices and at half of the CalWORKs District Offices. DPSS administrators initially suggested that we ask Eligibility and GAIN Services Workers to inform recipients and participants about the importance of participating in our study and refer them to our survey researchers. Unfortunately, this method of recruiting respondents yielded far too few survey interviews at each office. It proved to be most effective for interviewers to directly approach CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants as they waited in office lobbies to be called for their appointments. In all, we interviewed 147 CalWORKs recipients and 68 GAIN participants.

GAIN workers and CalWORKs eligibility staff were randomly selected from within each unit using office rosters provided to us by office directors or administrators. Among CalWORKs eligibility staff, only Intake and Approved Eligibility Workers were interviewed. We completed interviews with 56 CalWORKs Eligibility Workers, 8 of their direct supervisors, 70 GAIN Services Workers, and 9 of their direct supervisors.

See Appendix A for a more in-depth discussion of the survey methods used in this evaluation.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are essentially extended group interviews. To capture detailed information, a group ideally includes no more than six to seven people in addition to a facilitator and an assistant. The facilitator asks a series of questions, and group members respond. Groups can often go beyond the preconceptions of the researchers, as group members steer the interview in unexpected directions. Participation is typically compensated; our GAIN participants were given certificates for \$50 in groceries. Fifty-seven volunteers participated in our focus groups.

We conducted eight focus groups at two GAIN Regional Offices. One office was selected because of the racial and ethnic diversity of the clientele it serves, representing the whole range of Los Angeles County welfare recipients. Because roughly half of the population served by DPSS is Latino, and because immigrant Latinos are likely to have different needs and experiences than the native-born, we chose the second office, which serves large numbers of both native-born and immigrant Latinos. Four focus groups were held at each office, all during December 1998. Later groups will be held at other offices throughout the entire region. The group sessions lasted approximately two hours each. They were audio taped and transcribed. The process was greatly facilitated by the excellent cooperation of Regional Directors, staff, employees, and participants at these sites.

Four of the eight focus groups consisted of participant volunteers who had recently completed the GAIN Orientation, the point of entry into the GAIN program. Most of our participants had never been in GAIN before. Three participant groups

were conducted in English and one in Spanish. The majority of our participants were Latino (immigrant and native-born) or African American with a smaller group of Anglos.

We questioned participants about their experiences with GAIN personnel and practices; their understanding of the program; their needs in moving from welfare-to-work; the degree to which their needs were being met; and their recommendations for improving practices (see Appendix D). It is important to note that because our participants were relatively new to GAIN, they were not well acquainted with the full range of GAIN activities and practices. The original participants will be invited to participate in at least two additional focus groups in the future. Our objective is to follow their experiences in the program and its impact on their families at different points in their welfare-to-work trajectories.

The second four focus groups were among staff: we selected one GSW and one GSW Supervisor group from each site. These groups were ethnically diverse, including Asian Americans (Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodians), African Americans, Latinos, and Anglos. Like the participants, they were asked about their daily experiences and how well current GAIN practices helped move participants towards employment. More details about the focus groups are available in Appendix C.

Who was not in our sample?

Our surveys and focus groups did not put us in contact with the full range of experiences that CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants might have had as of late 1998. For example, we were unable to measure the experiences of recipients and participants who spoke neither English nor Spanish. Though 89% of the population aided by CalWORKs²² were English or Spanish speakers, thousands of aided adults spoke only

Armenian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Chinese, Russian or another less common language (see Appendix I). GAIN services for these linguistic groups have been contracted out from DPSS to the Department of Community and Senior Services (DCSS). DCSS, through its services to refugees, has extensive experience with those communities. DCSS has, in turn, contracted out services to community organizations. For this early report, we chose to focus on the main body of participants and recipients. We will in subsequent evaluations assess the collective and individual experiences of these diverse groups as they may well have needs that differ from the rest of the CalWORKs population.

III. INFORMING RECIPIENTS AND PARTICIPANTS

This section concerns the mechanisms put in place by DPSS to communicate with new applicants, ongoing CalWORKs recipients and new or current welfare-to-work participants about program changes. DPSS has taken a multi-method approach to communicating with recipients and participants, spreading information through the mail, through videos and posters in its offices, and through interactions between staff and people receiving aid. However, please note that in our surveys we focused exclusively on whether *workers* were communicating program changes to recipients and participants. We will investigate in future research the effectiveness of other methods used by DPSS to relay information.

Applicants

As part of our CalWORKs survey, we interviewed 40 new CalWORKs applicants.²³ The first welfare worker the new applicant sees in a CalWORKs District Office is the information clerk. As shown in Table 5, almost all of our applicants found clerks helpful (90%). In some offices, the next step involves an interview with an Intake Eligibility Screener. The screener does an initial review of the application. If the applicant appears eligible, the screener refers the applicant to an Intake Eligibility Worker. Applicants who do not go through a screener are sent directly to an Intake EW. Intake EWs are the workers most responsible for informing new applicants about program benefits, requirements, and services.

Table 5. Treatment and Availability of Information, CalWORKs Recipients, 1998

	New CalWORKs			Current CalWORKs		
	Recipients			Recipients		
	Yes	No	# of Responses	Yes	No	# of Responses
Clerk at the window was helpful	90%	10%	40	92%	8%	106
Eligibility Worker (EW) was helpful	78%	23%	40	86%	14%	106
<i>EW explained ...</i>						
5 year lifetime limit on cash aid	62%	39%	39	60%	40%	107
2 year aid limit	56%	44%	40	56%	44%	107
Child support cooperation policy	74%	26%	40	60%	40%	107
Proof of immunization requirement	82%	18%	40	75%	26%	104
Proof of school attendance requirement	70%	30%	38	72%	28%	105
Availability of benefits for U.S.-born children of non-citizens	75%	25%	8	61%	39%	18
Medi-Cal or Healthy Families eligibility without cash aid	73%	28%	40	66%	34%	107
Availability of transportation assistance	43%	58%	40	43%	57%	107
Availability of child care while working or in job training	73%	28%	40	69%	31%	107
Appointment included opportunity for questions	82%	18%	39	81%	19%	107
Questions were answered to recipient's satisfaction	97%	3%	30	89%	12%	87
Written materials were available in recipient's language	88%	13%	8	94%	6%	18
Sample Size			40			107

Visit Durations

How much time, on average, were CalWORKs recipients required to spend in the office in order to apply for aid or to receive assistance with a problem? We asked recipients when they had arrived at the office, and, comparing arrival times with the time of our interview, we computed an average visit duration time. The longest visit we recorded was five hours, forty-five minutes. On average, however, applicants for CalWORKs assistance had been in the office for 97 minutes. Continuing recipients had been in the office only 50 minutes on average. We did not ask recipients whether or not they had an appointment. Note that we interviewed most of our respondents while they were waiting to be seen by a DPSS staff member, meaning that their visits were still *in progress*. Some respondents had only just arrived. The average length of *completed* visits is likely to be considerably higher.

Average in-progress visit durations, CalWORKs recipients, 1998

	Average Time Elapsed	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Applicants	97 min.	+/- 78 min.	0 min.	5 hrs., 45 min.
Continuing Recipients	50 min.	+/- 40 min.	5 min.	4 hrs. 5 min.

Source: URD CalWORKs Recipient Survey, 1998

Over three-quarters of the new applicants interviewed were of the opinion that they found their Eligibility Worker helpful, while a bit more than one-fifth disagreed. Four-fifths (82%) said that they were able to ask questions of the worker, and of those who asked for information, nearly all (97%) had their questions answered to their satisfaction.

When they see workers, applicants should be informed about CalWORKs benefits, requirements, and services. We found that the majority of new recipients said they had been informed about each of the key changes and new requirements listed in Table 5, with the exception of transportation assistance. Just over half (56%) recalled having been told about the two-year (18/24 month) limit on aid receipt, for instance,

Point of Information

while four-fifths (82%) reported having been informed about the requirement to show proof that their children had been properly immunized. Slightly less than half (43%), however, said that their worker had discussed the availability of transportation assistance for recipients who were participating in welfare-to-work activities.

Surprisingly, less than two-thirds (62%) of new participants had been informed about the five year lifetime limit on cash aid, and just slightly more than half had been told about the two year limit on welfare-to-work assistance. We found that many participants appeared unaware of CalWORKs requirements with regard to establishment of paternity (26%), proof of child immunization (18%), and proof of child's school attendance (30%); if participants do not comply with these requirements, their aid will be at least temporarily reduced. More than one-quarter (28%) of new recipients reported not having been informed about the availability of child care to recipients when they became employed or participated in welfare-to-work activities.

Ongoing Recipients

The ongoing aid recipients who participated in our survey at CalWORKs offices were visiting for a variety of reasons. Like the new recipients, almost all (92%) found the information clerk helpful. Most also found their Eligibility Worker helpful (86%). In most instances, current participants were *less* well informed than new applicants, but the differences were not large. For example, there was essentially no difference in awareness about the availability of transportation assistance between current participants and new applicants (both 43%). On the other hand, 74% of new applicants were aware of the paternity establishment requirement, compared to 60% of current participants. The gap in knowledge, however, is largest in areas least likely to

affect ongoing participants whose eligibility has been determined, like paternity establishment or the eligibility of U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants.

In sum, most new applicants and current CalWORKs recipients have been told by DPSS about most new aspects of CalWORKs. Still, many participants reported not having been informed about programmatic items. For example, 40% of ongoing CalWORKs recipients said they were not told about the five year lifetime limit on cash aid, and 57% said they had not been told about the availability of transportation assistance for welfare-to-work activities. Unfortunately, we were not able to rate participants' actual understanding of the information they did receive; we only know that they recalled having been told.

Table 6. Information and Treatment, GAIN Participants, 1998

	Yes	No	# of Responses
Clerk at the window was helpful	95%	5%	66
GAIN Services Worker (GSW) was helpful	90%	10%	65
GSW explained 5 year lifetime limit on cash aid	84%	16%	67
GSW explained 2 year aid limit	86%	14%	67
GSW explained that participant could go to school or training	85%	15%	67
GSW explained availability of transportation assistance	94%	6%	67
GSW clearly explained welfare-to-work activities	83%	17%	68
GSW explained 32 hour/week activity requirement	83%	17%	68
GSW explained Medi-Cal or Healthy Families eligibility	83%	17%	68
GSW explained availability of child care while working or in job training	94%	6%	68
Appointment included opportunity for questions	94%	7%	66
Questions were answered to participant's satisfaction	91%	9%	57
Written materials were available in participant's language	90%	10%	12

Source: URD GAIN Participant Survey, 1998

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

GAIN Participants

When GAIN participants arrive at a District or Regional office for their Orientation, they are greeted by a clerk at a window, just as are CalWORKs recipients. While GAIN participants may have been oriented to CalWORKs by an Intake EW, many participants have been receiving assistance for some time, and their Orientation and Appraisal—both described in detail below—will be their main sources of information. When we conducted our survey of GAIN participants, some had just completed Orientation and Appraisal, while others had been through them some time in the past.

In our surveys, we asked participants about what they had learned from their GSW, meaning that some were telling us about their meeting for the Appraisal, while others were thinking of more recent meetings.

On all items, GAIN participants were more likely to have been informed about program changes than were non-GAIN CalWORKs recipients (see Table 6 on page 42). Over 90% of participants had been informed about transportation assistance and the availability of child care, and over 80% had been informed about all other items in our list, including time limits and the availability of training. Just over 90% found their GSW helpful, 94% said that they did have an opportunity to ask questions, and 91% of those who took the opportunity to ask questions said that their questions were answered satisfactorily. In addition, 90% said that written materials were in a language they understood—meaning that one in ten did *not* get materials in a language they understood.

Although we know that most participants were informed about the program changes that most affect them, we did not ask precisely what they were told nor did we test their understanding of that information. Inaccurate statements about CalWORKs made by participants in our focus groups suggest this as an area for further research.

Informed About Special Services?

Past research on welfare recipients has indicated that a substantial portion of recipients are drug or alcohol substance abusers (SA); have mental health (MH) problems ranging from depression to schizophrenia; or are victims of domestic violence (DV). While eliminating these problems is not a goal of CalWORKs *per se*, all of them have been identified as major barriers that are likely to keep recipients from becoming self-supporting. The CalWORKs initial programmatic answer to these problems is a set of

“supportive services,” intended to help the recipient become able to work as quickly as possible. We refer to SA, MH, and DV services as “special services” to distinguish them from other supportive services, such as child care or transportation assistance.

Table 7. Participant Knowledge Of and Use of Special Services, 1998

	GAIN Participants			CalWORKs Recipients		
	Yes	No	# of Responses	Yes	No	# of Responses
<i>Worker informed you about services for ...</i>						
Substance Abuse	83%	17%	63	48%	52%	147
Mental Health	84%	16%	63	46%	54%	147
Domestic Violence	87%	13%	62	56%	44%	147
Explanation was clear? ¹	92%	8%	59	68%	32%	84
Were comfortable discussing those topics? ¹	91%	9%	58	86%	14%	123
Sample Size			68			147

Source: URD GAIN Participant and CalWORKs Recipient Surveys, 1998

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

¹ Asked of respondents who reported being told about at least one of the three special services.

DPSS initially adopted a policy of allowing participants with DV, SA, or MH problems to identify themselves, while also asking EWs and GSWs to keep an eye out for people with such problems. The practice of informing participants about the availability of special services was particularly key at that point, and remains important. Advocates argued that this was inadequate, pointing towards the low rates of referrals DPSS has encountered so far. DPSS responded by adopting a set of eight questions²⁴

that EWs and GSWs ask new recipients and participants to screen for MH and SA needs.

In our surveys, we found that almost all GAIN participants had been told about the availability of special services (from 83% for substance abuse to 88% for domestic violence; see Table 7). Virtually all (91%) found GSW explanations of the services clear. Relatively few participants objected to these rather personal questions (10%).

Compared to GAIN participants, the CalWORKs recipients we interviewed reported being a good deal less aware of special services availability. As shown in Table 7, less than half told us that they had been aware that they could ask for special services for substance abuse (48%) or mental health (46%). A bare majority (56%) knew about domestic violence services. A full third (33%) did not find the EW's explanation of the services clear. A higher proportion of CalWORKs recipients (14%) felt uncomfortable discussing these issues than was the case among GAIN participants.

IV. MOTIVATING WELFARE-TO-WORK

Though the GAIN Division of the DPSS Bureau of CalWORKs administers a bundle of distinct welfare-to-work services, GAIN is more than just a set of programs and procedures. GAIN has a philosophy and a heartfelt mission. The GAIN slogan “A Job. A Better Job. A Career” is ubiquitous on the walls of GAIN Regional Offices. GAIN espouses a doctrine that puts a great deal of emphasis on the intrinsic rewards of work. The GAIN philosophy is summed up in this passage from the DPSS web page:

- L.A. GAIN believes that everybody is better off working.
- L.A. GAIN’s philosophy and message, “a job, a better job, a career”, is practical and powerful. Participants are shown how even an entry-level job will greatly benefit the family, and will provide experience which will assist the parent in securing a better job later.
- L.A. GAIN encourages, assists and requires CalWORKs recipients to support their children by preparing for and accepting work.
- L.A. GAIN’s message to welfare recipients:
 - Once you start working you can get a good idea of what your abilities are, what qualities employers want and what other job opportunities are available.
 - Your working, whether full or part-time, will generate pride in earning at least part of your family support and lessens the need for welfare dependency.
 - By working, you demonstrate the self-growth and independence which provide the positive role model that your children need to become successful, productive adults.
 - Participants are encouraged to work full or part-time even if they want to pursue education or training. A job is an education too.²⁵

In sum, the *work first* philosophy holds that once people start working, their commitment to work will be solidified and their skill needs become clearer. *Work first* is not opposed to education and training, but it sees them as supplements to rather than substitutes for employment.

In the following sections, we assemble data from focus groups to examine how well participants understand and accept the *work first* message.

Making Ends Meet

There is considerable evidence in the research literature that welfare recipients want to work, and our research is no exception. They are unhappy with welfare, but believe or have learned through experience that they can keep their children better fed and in better health by accepting public assistance.²⁶ Our research agenda includes using focus groups to help determine whether welfare reform has changed the beliefs and realities of welfare recipients. Our longitudinal focus group methods call for following several groups of participants through GAIN, starting just after the GAIN Orientation and Appraisal, through Job Club, and beyond. This research is still in progress, and the results from only the first set of focus groups were available as we wrote this report. People in these groups described their experiences with welfare and CalWORKs prior to GAIN, their brief experiences with GAIN itself, and their hopes for the future. Consequently, this section deals mainly with “where they are at” before CalWORKs recipients enter GAIN, what their hopes and aspirations are as they enter the program, and what their experiences have been.

In our focus groups, participants constructed detailed accounts of their encounters with the CalWORKs program and their interactions with staff. The statements they made often reflected understandings of the program that were at odds

with official CalWORKs policies. Gaps between official policy and “ground level” implementation are inevitable, particularly with newly implemented programs. Participants’ reported experiences should be interpreted cautiously, however. A client who told us that she had not received any warning letters before being sanctioned had probably ignored letters she did receive. Her perception that she had received no notification may have meant that the letters themselves or their seriousness were unclear to her.

Note that, in writing up our findings from our focus groups, due to the difficulties of transcribing a multi-way conversation, we were not always able to identify which person was speaking in the focus group. Where this occurred, we simply identify the speaker as “participant.” With these *caveats*, we present a discussion from the focus groups of the participants’ pre-GAIN experiences, focusing on what is like to support a family on welfare.

In Los Angeles County, as of October 1998, a family of three headed by a non-disabled, working age, single parent who was not employed received a monthly cash grant of no more than \$611 (see Appendix J). The family also received a maximum of \$329 in food stamps, yielding a total monthly budget of \$940, well under the federal poverty line of \$1,094 a month for a family of this size. Researchers Edin and Lein,²⁷ who collected data on the budgets of welfare-reliant single mothers in five U.S. cities, argued that it is simply not possible for a family to get by on public assistance alone. CalWORKs makes it possible for parents to combine welfare and work to increase their monthly incomes, even with minimum wage jobs.

Members of our focus groups, however, were just entering the GAIN welfare-to-work program, and were thus trying to make ends meet without the benefit of

employment income. Reflecting on the difficulty of this task, we were told in one of our focus groups that the cash part of the grant “all goes to the rent.”

Socorro: I’m telling you all of it goes to the rent and all that I have left is \$40 and that goes to the baby’s pampers. And that’s it.

Asked how they survived each month, the group was eager to explain. “It’s very hard” was a common refrain, and several members agreed with the response: “Juggle.” Their discussion of bill-paying strategies is illustrative.

Participant: I’ll be sending the rent the date of the late notice, if that’s making it, then that’s what we’re doing, because you just have to prioritize. OK, what’s the date of the late notice, or the disconnect notice. And that’s the bill, that is how you prioritize your priorities for the month.

Participant: Yeah, my telephone. I have it only local, to Long Beach. This way, I cannot call anywhere, this way my bill is only \$12 a month. Because I need my telephone for my kids when they’re in school. Or for anything that happens, I need that telephone.

The focus group participants also reported on their food shopping strategies.

Socorro: You have to go to the market and get this food [at a local discount supermarket chain]. And the food goes spoiled more faster. Because you cannot afford prices like Vons or stuff where the food is better. Quality food. Because if you go to the quality food, you’re going to get less. And you’re not going to have enough to feed your kids for a month. But then you go to this [supermarket] and the food, if you don’t use it real fast, it goes spoiled.

Participant: Everything just spoils.

Participant: ... It's so sad because it's not like you go to a market and say I'm going to buy the groceries. You know, I shop around. I just start walking from one market to another, [looking] for the best prices.

The focus group participants had much more to say about how they got their aid payments to meet most of their needs. One variation on this theme had to do with the use of food stamps, rather than cash, to pay for food.

Patricia: This is what I do. I get my food stamps. I go and I buy my kids their beans, their rice, their stuff. If we get a piece of steak that will be a miracle. OK. I'll go buy them but ... Budget it. But then I got a grown son, 13 years old, and I'm cooking and he's "oh, mom, I want to eat that." And I says "no." He wants hot dogs and pizza. And my 10-year-old daughter wants pizza. I'm like "I can't." And she says, "find somebody that takes the food stamps to buy a pizza." I said "leave the pizza man alone, we only have food stamps."

Participant: What I do, is I divide my food stamps by four. And then let's say, let's say, if it's for \$200, let's say if you get some \$50 a week, no matter if I'm like scraping it's \$50, so it will last for the four weeks. I think that everybody that's on food stamps, at the last week of the month, it's the hardest. There's no milk. There's no cereal. There's no bread in the house. There's no eggs.

Socorro: My kids are looking for bread, for eggs.

Olivia: Fruit, forget it. Just the basics.

Finding the monthly benefits inadequate for meeting living expenses, participants dedicated a good deal of time to trying to supplement their resources from other government and private programs.

Selma: You gotta call around to find some pantries. You know.

Participant: What helps me out is the WIC [federal Women, Infants, and Children] program. And they give you milk, and they give you eggs.

Patricia: See I got off the WIC when my son started drinking regular milk. But I've been thinking very seriously of going back because my son loves milk.

Selma: You still can get it up to, what, five years old.

When Socorro reported that she lived in a one bedroom apartment with her two sons, and that this took \$475 out of her \$525 monthly check, the focus group moderator asked how she makes ends meet. She referred again to other resources:

Socorro: I just have to budget myself. Go to the food, to the places where they give, where they give clothes, all these places.

Moderator: Food banks. Anybody use ...?

All: Yes.

Although other government programs and private philanthropic organizations may help supplement CalWORKs aid, conservative analysts have emphasized the use of extended family resources as an alternative to welfare. When one woman mentioned her good fortune in having her father to drive her to the market, the moderator asked to what extent the participants were helped by their families.

Selma: I don't have no family out here.

Participant: All of my family is back in [rural town]. That's where I grew up, in [rural town], California. All my family, so right here I have nobody, it's just me and my kids.

Participant: I mean I have family here. I have an aunt and my father's here. But unfortunately my father is retired, on a fixed income. You know he has his own home, you know he helps whenever he can, but you have, and it's bad to say, but you have family members that really...

Participant: ...won't even help.

Participant: And everyone in your family may work. And then so they don't have the time.

Olivia: They have their own life.

Participant: ... And like you say, you borrow money, you gotta pay it back.

Even when family was available and did have resources, assistance was unlikely to be unlimited:

I have my sister. She works and she doesn't have any children right now, you know, she just got married. But I know when she starts having children, that's it. Right now she'll bring him shoes and stuff like that so my son has clothing and I mean it's your situation, too.

The state welfare reform act explicitly encourages the formation of two-parent families, but in framing the California State law, legislators recognized that this is not always unproblematic. One woman noted that this alternative to welfare had not been successful for her.

Olivia: I moved a man in and stayed in this relationship, an abusive, ugly, nasty relationship, just so I could make ends meet. Make sure my kids had shoes on. And make sure there was milk in the refrigerator. I did that for a long time. [In background: "Oh, that's terrible."]

The conversation then turned to the largest item in the monthly parade of bills, the rent. Although Los Angeles area rents have, in general, come down relative to the highs of the late 1980s, finding affordable housing is by no means an easy task.

I had a place where I used to stay in Koreatown. This was like four years ago. And it was like move in special: \$199. The rent was \$500. And I had, I was like, I want to try to move back down there. And I called him again. A one bedroom now is like ... \$690. It costs you \$1,100 to move in. So there's people who can barely [afford to] move ...

One of the participants encountered major problems when a large and unexpected bill appeared. She said,

[All] of the sudden this one bill comes in, they want \$745. And so, it was like I am trying to pay them and then I'm trying to pay the rent. So I end up getting evicted. ... And then I'm like, what am I going to do? And it's really hard.

In searching for a new apartment, she reported the difficulty in choosing among unsavory alternatives.

Participant: And with me having teenage boys, it's harder for me because I have to be careful of where I move.

Selma: Yeah, make sure the homies don't ...

Participant: Cuz I don't want to worry. I'm under enough stress now and I don't want to worry, wondering "OK, my son's on the bus, he's going to come home."

Participant: And a lot of owners don't want to rent to you...

Selma: Because you have all boys, think might be gang-related.

Participant: Exactly.

Another participant reported similar concerns about her current apartment.

I live in San Pedro. But in order to live in a better neighborhood, because if I lived down below Pacific, and my son, too, you know, there's constant killings down there. And

gang violence. Do I really want to walk through there and have my son as it is, he goes “look, mommy, tell them not to write on the walls.”

One focus group member moved into an all-electric apartment. Given the cost of electricity, this was something she came to regard as a mistake.

Well, I moved one time into a two-bedroom apartment when it was only \$400 but I would have to pay the utility. And it’s like she said, everything was electric there. And I say, OK, now my kids can finally have their own room together instead of sharing their room with mom. Or have a sofa bed where I have to have them in the bedroom. But the bills there were coming to \$180 ...

Another participant mentioned a program for helping with utility bills, but that was dismissed by others.

Participant: But it takes four or five months for them to send you that check. And then within that time your bill is constantly....

Participant: ...getting higher and higher.

Participant: ...and then it gets turned off.

On the other hand, having an apartment where the owners paid for utilities was not always a solution.

Participant: Right now where I live, the owner is constantly coming over to everybody’s apartment, because like the utilities are included, pounding on our door. “You have to stop using the furnaces!” How can we not use the furnaces when it’s so cold? And it’s an old building where all the air comes into the windows. What I had to do, is I had to go and get some newspaper and fill it all up and—

Selma: —throw, did you throw a piece of plastic across it?

Participant: Um, hmm. And once we close that door at night, not open it again and just seal it all up. Well, I feel like I'm sitting in a cage.

Others added examples of perceived landlord intrusion, such as putting bags in their toilet tanks to decrease water consumption.

In sum, the focus group participants talked about the difficulty of juggling bills while trying to stretch out dollars and food stamps to meet the needs of their children. They talked about the need to rely on additional resources in order to make ends meet, and most reported that their extended families were usually either unwilling or unable to be of much help. They noted that rent was their largest expense, and that the search for adequate, safe housing was very difficult. Utilities cropped up as an unexpected and often unpleasant secondary consideration, whether or not they were being billed for them.

In the end, we found that at least some of the participants reported that they were looking to welfare reform in general and GAIN in particular for a way out of these problems. One remarked that "I'd be excited if this program were to work and really do something to get me out of that situation," referring specifically to her housing difficulties. The moderator followed this up by asking a question. "Well, let me ask you this ... I mean you are in the program, things might get better ...?" The reply he received was "We praying that it do [sic]."

Work and Participant Aspirations

In the *work first* philosophy, nothing is as important for labor market success in the future as finding and holding onto a job in the present. The job comes first, but, especially for those with limited skills, career development must follow. The Post-Employment Services (PES) that DPSS is now developing are intended to aid in career

development. For participants to invest themselves wholeheartedly in GAIN, they must have faith that DPSS will be able to successfully boost them up the ladder, rung by rung. Because PES were largely unavailable in late 1998, and because there was no emphasis on PES in GAIN Orientations, it is hard to discern whether participants took PES into account when assessing their own chances for success. In the absence of evidence that more than a fraction of GAIN participants can become self-sufficient within five years, however, they are likely to be skeptical of the *work first* message.

Yet, the participants in our focus group almost universally endorsed the primary goals of GAIN. They wanted to get off welfare, and they wanted to be able to take pride in supporting their own families. These sentiments were reflected in one participant's response to receiving the notice to come to the Orientation:

I like the program...I think it will motivate and help us to get ahead so that little by little we can get away from the help we're receiving from the government, so we can take care of ourselves.

This focus group participant shares with the GAIN philosophy the goal of self-sufficiency and thinks that participation in the program will assist her in achieving results.

A man in another of our focus groups spoke more directly to the issue of self-worth:

I'll think it will help the family, too. I have an 8-year-old son at home and he sees me in the mornings, most mornings now, you know, sitting there, he's getting ready for school. And you know, he wondering, "Well, Dad, why you're not working no more. What's going on?" And I can't buy him the things he wanted for Christmas this year. And if this job, this program, you know, help me out a little bit, get me out, motivate me to find something to do, and find me something to do, it would help my son and myself quite a bit. So I'm looking forward to it. I really am.

The feelings of our participants, however, were seldom one-sided. Another participant who was hopeful about working also felt sorrow at the potential loss of time with her children:

Rhonda: The positive thing about it all is just “let’s all get us a job and take care of our young’uns” and the negative part about this is, we’re not going to be, you know, be there [for our kids] 24 hours like we were. But it’s beneficial to them, because then they be proud to say, “Well my mom and my dad they have ... Yeah, my mom, honey, she don’t get off work until 5 o’clock.” Some kids like, “Where is your mom at?” “At home sleeping.”

Julie: Waiting for a check to come in the mail.

Children were mentioned often with regard to the desire to work, whether in the context of being able to provide for them, or making them proud, or in worrying about how well they will be cared for when the participants are working.

Participant: I was happy when I got the notice [to come to the Orientation] because now I’m able to take care of my son the way that I want to.

Participant: I received the letter in the past from GAIN. And I didn’t follow through with it. And I’m back now because, you know, I need a better job. I don’t have a job, I need a better job, I need a job so I can get off of welfare and do more things for myself and my children.

For other participants, a job that enables them to be self-sufficient also means freedom from bureaucratic rules, intrusive questions, and endless paperwork.

Lucy: I got to land on my feet. I’m just, uh, I don’t really like answering to anybody. I do not like answering to anybody. I do not like answering, I just don’t want to fill out the paperwork. I don’t like this Recertification.

Lily: Once you get a job...we don't have the County telling us, "You have to be here today. You have to fill out this paper and send it in today."

In any event, many participants expressed high hopes about what GAIN could do for them in the area of education. Many participants told us that they did not presently have the skills to obtain a good job. Instead, they had plans that involved a good deal of additional education or training.

Selma: I've been in school for a while. And I took accounting. So I just have like, finished all my accounting classes until I can go to a university. But right now I'm studying cooking, chef, and fashion. ... I want to be a chef. But fashion, that's more like my hobby, I guess, right now.

Charelle: My goal is, my goal is to start from now until six years. My goal is to go back for my GED. After that computers. After computers, business management. Then real estate. Then accountant. And there's something else I have to take. That's my five-year goal plan.

These goals for the future may be somewhat unrealistic in the context of GAIN, which, following AB1542 mandates, puts a high emphasis on work in the present. One participant, however, reported problems securing approval for a much less ambitious six-week course.

Well, I would like to be a nurse. And starting in January I'm going to take a CNA [Certified Nursing Assistant] class for a start off.

According to current DPSS policy, training to become a Certified Nursing Assistant is an approvable SIP. The participant reported that her GSW was opposed to the SIP, however, and tried to convince her to seek immediate employment instead.

They're really not sure if they're going to pay for my child care for that. They really want you to work. But I think they should let you choose if you want to go to work or go to school. You know, cuz I never had a job before. ... I'm already enrolled in it and everything. And like I said, I told my social worker [GSW], I'll have to come back next week and she is going to decide if they will help me with my child care.

The participant may have been unqualified for the SIP for reasons she did not report to us, but the message she came away with was that the program values *work first* above all else. Commenting on this participant's troubles, another participant observed,

See, that's where they mess up though. That's where I think they biggest mistake is. That's the only problem I have with it, is the school and the job.

If there was one aspect of GAIN that participants were uneasy with, it was the philosophy of *work first*. Though some participants had harbored hopes that GAIN would place them in extensive training programs, many accepted, without enthusiasm, the idea that moving into low-wage employment could be to their benefit. These people trusted, guardedly at least, that GAIN could fulfill its promise to move them up the wage ladder.

Sure, you know, it's like \$6 an hour, it's like sh—. But right now, I'll take it. You know, crawl before you walk. I can save up my little ends and get me a little "hooptie" [an old, undependable car], a "little bucket", as they call it. And then I'm gonna find a better job. You know, cuz experience, you know, you have to have experience now days.

The responses of others were more tempered by the effects of the requirement to "Get a job, a better job, a career." While hopeful that the program would help, for some, the

sort of entry level, low paying jobs that they were likely to get meant a long, difficult road ahead.

Well, I guess that's kind of what they're trying to do by getting us a job. I think that's why they want us to go to the Job Club and maybe take, take that job at Target or whatever. And save some money so we can get transportation so we can get better jobs so we can get schooling. It's going to take a long time for us.

In sum, the participants in our focus groups embraced most if not all of the philosophy espoused by the GAIN program in Los Angeles County. They were anxious to enter GAIN and be launched on the road to self-sufficiency because of the difficulties they face while living on welfare, because they want to be able to better provide for themselves and their children, because they want the pride that being self-supporting can bring, because they have specific aspirations they hope that GAIN can help with, and because they are simply tired of negotiating the welfare bureaucracy. The most commonly expressed hesitation about the program in this regard was the perception that GAIN was too impatient for participants to begin work before acquiring the skills participants felt they needed.

Work and Barriers

It is commonly assumed by broad sections of the public that welfare recipients do not work and that most have never worked. This is increasingly questionable as the emphasis on work among welfare programs increases.

Table 8. Work History of GAIN Participants and CalWORKs Recipients, 1998

	GAIN Participants	CalWORKs Recipients
Working Now	17%	16%
Worked in Past	72%	69%
Never Worked	10%	15%
Total	100%	100%
# of Responses	69	147

Source: URD GAIN Participant and CalWORKs Recipient Surveys, 1998

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

Table 8 shows that roughly one sixth of our survey respondents, whether currently in GAIN or in CalWORKs only, were working at the time of the survey. Only one in ten of our GAIN respondents had never worked, and the proportion among CalWORKs recipients was not much higher (15%). Admittedly, this is not a random sample of all GAIN participants and CalWORKs recipients, but this is an indication that work is not an entirely foreign experience to most.

Table 9. Reasons Difficult to Find or Keep a Job, by Program, 1998

	GAIN		CalWORKs	
	Participants		Recipients	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
	Citing Reason	Citing Reason	Citing Reason	Citing Reason
Child care	17	19%	48	34%
Transportation	11	12%	13	9%
Lack of job skills/education	19	21%	37	26%
Lack of English fluency	8	9%	~	~
Caretaker for disabled family member	~	~	8	6%
Lack of job experience	~	~	8	6%
No jobs available	~	~	6	4%
Concerns with immigration status	~	~	12	8%
Other	34	38%	11	7%
Total	89	100%	143	100%

Source: URD GAIN Participant and CalWORKs Recipient Surveys, 1998

~ Fewer than five responses—any responses in this category were combined with “Other.”

Since most participants had work experience, why were they not working at the time of our survey? We asked both our working and non-working respondents why they find it difficult to find or keep a job (see Table 9). For GAIN participants, more than one-fifth (21%) cited a lack of skills or education as their biggest problem. For non-GAIN CalWORKs recipients, lack of skills was mentioned slightly less often (26%) than their number one problem: child care (34%). Child care problems were cited by 19% of GAIN participants as a serious barrier to finding or maintaining

employment. Transportation difficulties were the third most frequently mentioned barrier for both groups (12% for GAIN, 9% for CalWORKs).²⁸

If skills deficits, child care difficulties, and transportation problems are the top three work barriers cited by participants, it is not a coincidence that GAIN provides skills training, child care services, and transportation assistance. Research on earlier welfare-to-work programs identified these as primary needs, and this was recognized in drafting the federal and state reform bills. In citing “the importance of implementation” in a recent study, researchers²⁹ underlined the fact that the success of reform efforts depend even more on *how* services are provided than on which services are offered.

Barriers and No-Shows

Our focus group participants should not be mistaken for a cross-section of all welfare recipients referred to GAIN for welfare-to-work activities. Since we recruited participants during the GAIN Orientation, we have no representation of the participants who did not appear on the days we visited the GAIN Regional Offices.

According to GAIN staff, relatively few of the participants called in to GAIN actually attend the first Orientation session to which they are assigned, even though attendance is mandatory. Many risk having their aid cut rather than attending the first, second, or even third session to which they are assigned. This has been a pattern faced by welfare agencies in other California Counties.³⁰ Though some workers (see below) put the worst possible interpretation on no-shows, participants suggested that part of the problem was due to DPSS not being flexible, accommodating, or even very clear about what was expected.

Orientation Logistics: Scheduling, Transportation, and Child Care

During 1998, the typical new entrant to GAIN had been receiving public assistance for some time and had been living his or her life without any regular need to visit CalWORKs or GAIN offices. Since the initial invitation to participate in GAIN did not come at any particular time—that is, the timing of the letter did not correspond to any events of which the participant was aware—there was no way for participants to plan for GAIN Orientation until the letter arrived. Participants might expect that, since the Orientation letter gave only one Orientation date and time that they could call the GAIN office to reschedule. Doreen, acting on this assumption, ran into some difficulties:

I received my letter in October. And at that time when I supposed to come in I couldn't because that day I had a doctor's appointment which was supposed to determine if I was going to have surgery or not. So I talked to [someone at the GAIN office] and she just sounded like, "Oh don't worry about it. That's Okay. Don't worry about it." So I didn't worry about it. So, "you'll get another letter." So I forgot about it. Then later, the following month, I got a letter that in December my cash aid was going to be canceled because I didn't go to my meeting.

Beyond scheduling problems, participants may face other barriers that make attending Orientation difficult. Lack of transportation is another obstacle that some Orientation attendees needed to overcome. Nearly four-fifths were able to reach the office with relative ease (79%), but another fifth encountered difficulties (see Table 10). Of those who traveled to the GAIN office by car—roughly half of the total—nearly one-third (31%) had a difficult time finding parking. Our survey team also encountered difficulties finding affordable parking in the areas around some GAIN offices.

Table 10. Transportation Availability and Usefulness for CalWORKs Recipients and GAIN Participants, 1998

	All CalWORKs Recipients			All GAIN Participants		
	Yes	No	# of Responses	Yes	No	# of Responses
Did your EW/GSW explain that you could get help with transportation if you are part of an education/training program?	43%	57%	147	94%	6%	67
Do you have access to a car?	34%	66%	147	39%	61%	68
Do you use public transportation?	78%	22%	147	79%	21%	68
Does it stop near your home?	92%	8%	114	87%	13%	56
Does it arrive often?	70%	30%	114	72%	28%	56
Does it run on hours you need it?	76%	24%	114	66%	34%	56
Is it safe, particularly at night?	20%	80%	114	23%	77%	56
Have you received transportation assistance from this office?	4%	96%	147	40%	60%	65
Does the transportation help you receive help you with welfare-to-work activities?	~	~	~	69%	31%	29
<i>For those who recently completed Orientation or Job Club ...</i>						
Was Orientation/Job Club was easily reached by car or public transportation?	~	~	~	79%	21%	68
Was parking available?	~	~	~	69%	31%	35

Source: URD GAIN Participant and CalWORKs Recipient Surveys, 1998

~ Too few responses on this item to report.

Table 10 shows that only a minority of CalWORKs recipients (34%) and GAIN participants (39%) say they have access to a car. Almost eight out of ten—

including some who have access to cars—use public transportation (78% for CalWORKs, 79% for GAIN) at least some of the time. Although we did not ask, we will assume that most of these are bus riders. Of those who take the bus, most live near bus stops (92% and 87%). On the down side, these busses do not run very frequently (30% of CalWORKs and 28% of GAIN respondents say so). More importantly, the bus only runs during the hours needed³¹ for two-thirds of the GAIN participants (and three quarters of the CalWORKs recipients). This means that one third of GAIN participants (and a somewhat smaller proportion of CalWORKs recipients) are potentially left without transportation at important times. In addition, few recipients and participants (20% and 23%) felt that public transportation was safe, especially at night.

Estela’s story illustrates other logistical difficulties that participants faced in attending the Orientation. Estela explained:

They told me I had to come. And I told them I didn’t have a babysitter. I have a nine-month-old daughter and a nine-month-old grandson, okay. And I have to get a babysitter for them and I had to get on the bus, go all the way to LA [to Inglewood from Compton], drop them off at their grandmother’s and come all the way back over here [Rancho Dominguez]. I left the house, probably at 5:00 A.M. with my baby, with my grandson in my arms.

In spite of her difficulties in making arrangements, Estela did attend Orientation. At present, parents like Estela must either use existing child care arrangements for the Orientation day, or else contact an R&R/APP—an agency responsible for making child care referrals and payments—to initiate the referral and payment authorization process.

Request for Child Care at the Orientation Site

The discussion of problems in making child care arrangements for Orientation led some focus group participants to suggest that GAIN offer child care during the Orientation day. When one participant lamented “It’s too bad the program doesn’t offer, doesn’t actually have a facility to do deal with that,” others agreed “that’s a good point.”

Nelda: If the County, if the County actually, it’s just like this here, this here room [a large conference room where the focus group was being conducted], it could be a day care. You know what I’m saying...

Lily: I think it would make it a lot easier. And maybe form some extra jobs.

Nelda: It sure would.

Lily: When you got that letter you would feel a lot better about it. I know I would, if I could have brought my son here with me and gone through the program and then came and got him and went home.

The same recommendation was brought up spontaneously by a man in another focus group.

But you know, overall, you ought to have them make baby-sitting for you. They have enough room to make a baby-sitting place for some of the mothers. Cuz, like I say, my baby is older now. But for some of the mothers, so when they come here there be no excuse, they can come bring the kids, and have somebody monitor. They can come and check on them from time to time.

DPSS plans to provide play areas³² in some of its new and remodeled offices. Legal concerns and lack of space, however, appear to be formidable barriers to adding an on-site Orientation-day child care program.

Problems with No-Shows

When we conducted our focus groups in December of 1998, GAIN offices were working under a mandate to get all eligible participants to report for Orientation by the end of the year. They were finding, however, that this was no easy task. Only 3% of GSWs responding to our survey said that most participants show up for their first GAIN appointment, and just one-third (34%) said that most participants appear for their second appointment.

Table 11. Reasons Given by Participants Who Do Not Appear for GAIN Appointments, Reported by GSWs, 1998

	Percent of all Reasons Given
<i>Participant Not Able to Appear Because of ...</i>	
Child care difficulties	39%
Personal or family medical problems	16%
Transportation problems	15%
Not having received notice of appointment	10%
All other reasons	20%
Total	100%
Total Number of Reasons Given	147

Source: URD Survey of GAIN Services Workers, 1998

Note: GSWs were allowed to cite multiple reasons.

We asked GSWs for the most common reasons cited by participants for not keeping appointments. Interviewers allowed each GSW to state up to three reasons. The most frequently cited are shown in Table 11. Child care difficulties heads the list, cited four out of ten times. “Personal or family medical problems,” meaning the ill health

of the participant or a family member, was cited only half as often (16%), while transportation difficulties accounted for a roughly equal proportion of reasons given (15%). These are not much different than the list of difficulties participants cited with regard to finding and holding employment (Table 9). Note, however, that GSWs were only reporting to us what participants told them; the GSWs expressed some skepticism about the accuracy of the participants' reasons.

Still, rather than dwelling on the problems faced by participants who miss one or perhaps two scheduled appointments before attending an Orientation, the GSWs focused their frustration on participants who never or only rarely complied with GAIN rules. One GSW lamented that:

There is a large percentage of participants that never even come in the door. We may never hear from them, so they're just going through the process of, they're just shifting the cases from one day to another, and when the last day comes, you, "Okay, they never showed. I have to sanction them." I'd say 80% of my caseloads never come in.

When GSWs speculated about the reasons that some people avoided coming to GAIN, most concluded that prospective participants are misinformed. The reforms are new and the correct information has not sunk in yet, the workers suggested. Other participants are fearful and try to avoid what they see as a punishment. Still other participants have calculated their finances and figure that they are better off taking the sanctions than coming in, the GSWs suggested.

Among the ranks of the misinformed, GSWs told us, were those who became involved with welfare-to-work programs that were not directly connected with GAIN. The federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), for example, has made a large amount of money available to job training programs that target current and former

welfare recipients. Participants joining these programs may not understand that they are separate from GAIN.

Some of them call in and say, “I’m already with JTPA” or something else. But they don’t understand it isn’t the same as us. But some of the, I don’t know if it’s JTPA or what, is giving them the impression that because they are part of that program they don’t have to worry about GAIN. But then we explain to them, “That’s fine if you want to participate with them, but you must participate with us if you still want to get your portion of your cash assistance each month. If you don’t come in, then it will be cut.”

Some GSWs felt that if participants only gave them the chance to properly explain the program, that the participants would want to take advantage of it. As one GSW explained,

I believe most of them, they believe that it is a punishment that we want them to come here. It is not like if we have a chance to explain to them what is going on, what they can get out of GAIN in such, in another way, like asking them to come here. Maybe if they know really what’s going on with GAIN and how GAIN can help them, they can participate.

A rather different angle was taken by a GSW who suspected that foul play was often at the root of non-participation.

I think that when the participants don’t come in and they get sanctioned for the first time, the second time, they don’t come in because they don’t need the money. They just probably, like the wife, the woman, is just saying that the husband is not [residing] at home and probably he is. It’s better for them to stay at home and not come in to GAIN and tell us that they’re working ... It’s more beneficial for them to lie.

This GSW, then, believed that many two-parent families were pretending to be one-parent families in order to avoid reporting the income of the supposedly-absent parents. If the “absent” parent’s income was high, it, when reported, could substantially reduce the family’s CalWORKs grant.

Some supervisors identified another population who would not be found at Orientation—former welfare recipients who had gotten jobs on their own without the help of the GAIN program. This was an unexpected but not necessarily unwelcome side-effect of mandatory GAIN participation.

A lot of them are being pushed themselves by welfare reform [to find jobs]. Because they don’t want to come in to GAIN, they don’t want to, you know, again, wanna be told what to do. And so they’re hearing out on the street that in order not to do what—to come into GAIN and do what GAIN wants you to do, you better get a job. So a lot of them are going out and getting their own jobs. So by the time they get that Appraisal letter to come in, they’re telling us, “I’m already employed.” And we’re counting that as an employment for us, but actually they have gotten that employment on their own.

Increasing GAIN participation rates, even among those who have found employment on their own,³³ is an important welfare-to-work goal. It is important for the program’s success to ascertain how many people avoid GAIN because they do not understand it, how many because they are—as some GSWs believe—too negative to appreciate it, and how many do not come for other reasons. Determining why people do not participate in GAIN and how they survive the sanctions that may result is part of our ongoing research mission.

GAIN Intake and Orientation

The Letter

Once participants are selected for registration into GAIN, they are automatically sent a letter informing them that they have an “Appraisal appointment” at a GAIN office. The letter instructs them to be at their assigned GAIN Regional Office or CalWORKs District Office at a specific date and time, and cautions them that there *may* be consequences if they do not attend. It also tells them to contact their appointed “GAIN Case Manager” if they have difficulties with the appointment date or with child care arrangements.

In our focus groups, we found that some participants arrived confused about why they received this letter and why they had to attend Orientation. These were primarily men and women who had been involved with GAIN before April 1, 1998, and the implementation of the CalWORKs welfare-to-work program. One of these women explained:

I had a letter from when GAIN was different [before April 1] saying I was exempted until my daughter was three. ... See they sent me a letter, I brought the letter and everything. It says, I'm exempt because my daughter is under three years old, come back when she is three. But they said that didn't apply no more.

The misconception that an exemption for parents of children under three years old still applied appeared to be widespread. For example, another participant told the group “I think it depends on who you get. Cuz [sic] my friend, this is her second child and she don't have to come back until her baby is three.”

Another woman who had volunteered for GAIN in the past was initially surprised and annoyed that she was being asked to repeat the program.

I was truly upset when I got that letter saying that I had to come back up here again. That I had gone through the original program when it first started. I had volunteered at that time because of all the stuff that they said they were going to do for you. I've been working a little job I've had for five years now. And I just told them I wasn't coming any more. You know, I had a job. So they let me go. And when I came back this time, I was upset and I went into the worker and I said "why do you have me here? You know, what's all this about? I went through this before." And they said, "oh it's new, we're going to start new ways."

The worker piqued her interest, however, with the suggestion that she might be able to train for a new job she would like to hold.

So I decided to come and see, check it out for myself to see if there's anything new they can do for me. Um, because I do want to work as a forklift driver in a factory somewhere and they said that they would train me to drive the forklift. So I'm going to stay in it for the long run and see what they do this time.

Others reported being confused by the tone of the initial Appraisal appointment letter. It appeared to be an almost-casual invitation to them, rather than a very serious program requirement. One woman was told by a worker that she could safely ignore the first letter.

Olivia: So I forgot about it. Then later, the following month I got a letter that in December my cash aid was going to be cancelled because I didn't go to my meeting.

Doreen: Oh, it's like, the same thing happened to me.

Olivia: Threat. You know, sounds like a threat.

Doreen: Yeah, I didn't appreciate that. Because on the letter, like they all say, it says "congratulations." Congratulations for what? And I was really in shock.

These women did, however, come to Orientation and avoid the aid cuts that would otherwise have been imposed.

Reactions to the Orientation Session

Once they arrive at the office, GAIN participants see an information clerk for initial intake, just as in the CalWORKs offices. After the brief intake procedure, the participant's first day in GAIN is divided into two parts, the Orientation session and the Appraisal. The Orientation session is a group affair, where as few as one and as many as forty participants are greeted by one or more instructors and led through an interactive introduction to GAIN that emphasizes self-esteem building and motivation enhancement. The facilitators work for LACOE, which is under contract with DPSS to lead these sessions. Participants are, among other things, given standard materials, shown a video, and given some preparation for the Appraisal that follows in the afternoon.

In order to recruit participants and familiarize ourselves with the program, our evaluation researchers attended several Orientation sessions at the target GAIN Regional Offices. The message could have been frightening: "AFDC and welfare as you know it are over; you must go to work. Your welfare time is limited and the clock is ticking." However, Orientation leaders delivered this message in a positive manner that stressed the importance of self-esteem and working to better oneself as the best road to success; the promise of help in getting a job; and the promise of child care, transportation, and supportive services for those who needed them. The reactions of participants in our focus groups to the Orientation were mixed, depending on their level of education, job skills, age, and whether they had been at the Orientation before. Here we report what participants liked and did not like about the Orientation practices.

Table 12. Ratings of GAIN Orientation, 1998

	All GAIN Participants		
	Yes	No	# of Responses
Orientation staff was courteous	100%	0%	58
GAIN presentation was understandable	97%	4%	58
Program was in a language the participant understood	98%	2%	58
Handouts were provided	98%	2%	58
Handouts were in a language the participant understood	98%	2%	57
Handouts were clear and easily understood	98%	2%	57
Orientation staff explained the handouts	98%	2%	58
Orientation included opportunity for questions	98%	2%	58
Questions were answered to participant's satisfaction	100%	0%	58
Orientation staff was motivating and supportive	98%	2%	58
Orientation provided participant motivation	91%	9%	58
Sample Size			58

Source: URD Survey of GAIN Participants, 1998

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

From what our respondents told us, the Orientation came close to meeting its goals for every single participant attending (see Table 12). Staff was universally regarded as “courteous” (100%), few had any difficulties understanding the presentation (2%), and the presentation was almost always language-appropriate (98%). Almost all participants found the staff “motivating and supportive” and only slightly fewer felt that the Orientation had motivated them personally (91%).

Respectful and Empathetic Instructors

The facilitators, armed with impressive videos and visual aids, were highly skilled teachers and motivators. Consistent with our survey results reported above, focus group members were generally quite enthusiastic about the Orientation sessions. Part of their enthusiasm reflected the energy of the facilitators—one participant exclaimed that “they glowed!” They presented themselves as people who were on the side of participants. They told participants that they themselves had been on welfare, so they knew what it was like to be on welfare and to be struggling to get ahead. This identification between the participants and the facilitators may have made the GAIN program, with its mandatory work requirements and strict sanctions for those who do not comply, more palatable to the new initiates.

Lily: I liked it a lot...The speakers, they both had been on welfare so they kind of knew where we were coming from.

Gabriela: They gave you something to look forward to, if this is what the program did for them, maybe it will do it for me.

The participants who felt down and out and discouraged liked the motivational message. As an unemployed father explained:

Yeah, they are making you think positive about yourself, you know. I was feeling kind of down and depressed when I came here because I've been looking for work for, let's say the last three to four months. I had interviews, but nothing came up. And they told me, “There's other people out there that's doing the same thing, just keep trying.” And I kind of got a good feeling from it.

Even participants who had ignored letters and resisted coming to Orientation were favorable afterwards:

Lily: I'm the one that got the 12 letters. I was not real happy to get the letter. And I had a reason after reason why I couldn't come and then I had surgery. And I've only been on welfare for about 5 months and my son is only one, so I'm a little bit scared about leaving him with day care. And um, but now that I got here, I, you know, it was a lot different than I thought it was going to be. It was more motivational on self-esteem and things like that. And I think that's something that a lot of us need. Especially being on welfare, it's not something that you're real proud of. So, um, I'm hoping they can get me a job and find a good day care place.

A common thread united most of the participants, whether or not they felt that they needed the inspirational message of the Orientation: the participants felt that they were treated with respect in the GAIN office.

In the short run...

While some participants felt they were given the impetus for taking the first steps toward getting a job, others felt that the motivational effects of the Orientation were short-term. As one said, "it carries you for that day" and not beyond. Others told us that motivation was not what they had hoped to get out of GAIN. The session was a waste of time, they implied; they simply needed help in finding a decent-paying job.

They're great motivators, but like, for motivating people, that's fine. But I don't think that's what we're here for, what some of us are here for. Because I think we are motivated. We're all motivated with our children. I mean, it's our children motivate us everyday to get up and get going and that's just the best motivation you have right there. But it's just at sometimes, you know, you have things that are hindering you from going out there. [In background: "Like life."]

Others felt insulted by being given instructions on how to dress and lectured about the necessity to bathe and brush their teeth when going out on interviews.

Olivia: Pardon me, yea, make sure that you brush your teeth and brush and bathe, what's the deal? I mean, give me a break. [Laughter from others]. That's what you tell a teenager.

While participants conceded that some might need such direction, a number of participants found these instructions to exemplify a “one size fits all” approach that is geared to those who are the least skilled and experienced. Not everybody needs this sort of pep talk, they told us. GAIN's failure to differentiate between those who do and those who do not need such basic instruction left some feeling talked down to.

These problems are exacerbated when participants who don't get through the program have to go through the Orientation again. Note that participants are only required to repeat the Orientation if they have not been registered with GAIN for six months or more. This could happen, for example, if they had incurred three or more sanctions, or if they had left CalWORKs for over six months.

Olivia: I think that sending everybody through this Orientation once a year is redundant. I really do. It's just repetitive. It's redundant. The same thing. Obviously, if it didn't work the first time, something should, something different should be done the second time.

Some people thought the Orientation was elementary and condescending, since they already knew how to dress and prepare for interviews. They felt that the Orientation was inappropriate in that it treated them as if they were “beginners.” Others who considered themselves “beginners,” however, felt that the Orientation was

inappropriate, even discouraging, because it set impossibly high standards for them.³⁴

The successful people in the videos were far, far better off than they were. Some of our Spanish-speaking participants said that while the videos and motivational messages were pretty, the reality was different for them because they lacked English and the skills to get good-paying jobs.

Luz: I'm a little disappointed because they say it is easy on the video because they show people that are more prepared, and we are just starting out.

Maceo: [The Orientation] motivated us, but at the same time it degraded us because it told us "you folks live in misery." You think that you're going to have a house in Beverly Hills, that you're going to earn \$18.00 an hour? When? When? In one year [the woman in the video] said. *Only if I steal it.*

Repeatedly, members of the Spanish-speaking group were pessimistic. They could not square the hopeful message of the Orientation with their situation. As one woman expressed it, the program gives you "a lot of motivation."

Being here one becomes enthusiastic. But upon leaving you can see the reality. It's very different being here, the videos, they show people who have improved their situation. I don't want to be pessimistic, but the reality is something else.

Thus, participants' evaluations of the Orientation ranged from very positive to somewhat pessimistic and negative. While the Orientation clearly served the needs of some participants, its one-size-fits-all approach did not acknowledge their varied abilities, circumstances, experiences, and needs.

Appraisal

From Orientation, participants go directly to their first meeting with GSWs. According to one GSW, “Basically, we do the evaluation during the intake phase after the Orientation. We meet with them and we try to learn a little bit about them, like ‘what is your status?’” The purpose of the meeting, in the words of another GSW, is to help set participants “on their road to becoming self-sufficient.” While the content of these sessions vary slightly, these brief meetings have a relatively full agenda:

1. Inform participants about program details not covered in the Orientation;
2. Determine participant needs for child care services, transportation assistance, and mental health, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol intervention services;
3. Establish whether or not the participant qualifies for a temporary or permanent exemption from GAIN (this may require an additional visit for the participant to provide third party written verification);
4. Determine whether any educational or vocational program that the participant is currently enrolled in can be approved by GAIN as a Self-Initiated Program (SIP) and thus substitute for some or all of the activities the participant would ordinarily be required to complete; and
5. Have the participant sign a “contract” specifying his or her welfare-to-work “rights and responsibilities.”

For most participants, the Appraisal meetings are entirely *pro forma*. Some circumstances, like the need for supportive services, requests for exemptions, approval of SIPs, or the prior employment of the participant call for some extra negotiation between the GSW and the participant. As a GSW told us,

Sometimes they come in and do [already have work]. We try to keep them employed and not to assign them to any activity that's going to jeopardize their current employment. So, that's what we mean by "working with them."

As we discuss later, however, our participants often felt that GSWs were not willing or able to work with them to the extent the participants would have liked.

Exemptions

The federal and state welfare reform acts have aimed to minimize the proportion of participants who can be exempted from work requirements. This is partly in response to past programs that attempted to transition welfare recipients into employment in which large proportions of the target population were able to win exemption.³⁵

CalWORKs recipients may ask to be exempted from participation in welfare-to-work activities on a variety of bases, such as the need to care for a child under six months old, or being age 60 or over (see Table 4 on page 26). Exemptions may be time-limited or permanent. Because federal funds cannot be used to exempt more than one-fifth (20%) of their caseloads, states are under pressure to minimize exemptions. In California, it is not clear to what degree this pressure has been applied downward, from the state to the counties, and from the counties to their front-line workers. It was clear from our survey interviews and focus groups with GSWs and their supervisors, however, that workers see maximizing GAIN participation as a central goal. The goal of maximizing participation potentially conflicts with the granting of large numbers of exemptions.

A theme in some of our GSW and Supervisor groups was that participants were too easily getting medical exemptions and thereby escaping welfare-to-work

requirements. One proposed solution to this perceived problem was more control over the medical exemption process:

Instead of going to any doctor that they want to [for a medical exemption], maybe like for SSI [Supplemental Security Income, a federal program for the aged and disabled], then you have to go to a doctor mandated by the County or something like.

Another issue that was raised in our GSW focus groups had to do with the application of work requirements to two-parent families. Adults in two-parent families are required to participate in work-related activities for a combined total of no less than 35 hours per week. The law permits one parent to meet the total requirements for the family, leaving the other parent free to care for their children. Only if the family receives child care assistance under CalWORKs are both parents required to participate, but the second parent can participate voluntarily even if not required. This is not technically an issue of exemption, but it does affect the proportion of recipients who participate in welfare-to-work activities, disturbing at least one GSW.

If the first parent isn't making enough to support the family, they're still on aid, but second parent doesn't have to participate. And I think that's something that really is a hindrance to them getting off of aid because really—in real life, many of us have to work, two parents. You know, we'd all like to stay home if one of us was working, but it's not a reality. I mean, if they could support their family and only one parent work, fine. But if you're still receiving aid, then both parents need to be working.

The concern here is not honesty or accuracy, as in the case of medical exemptions. Instead, the GSW invokes the common societal belief that most families in contemporary America need two adult workers in order to maintain a fair standard of

living. Allowing welfare recipients to escape this “reality,” the GSW suggested, coddles them while insulting hard-working Americans.

Although they have lessened some of the exemptions we give our participants to let them be—excuse them from participating, one that I feel is a problem is code “8”, which is for a child: if they have a child under the age of one, they don’t have to work until that child turns one.³⁶ But really, in reality, we [GSWs] have six weeks, you know. That’s—so, it shouldn’t be any different from someone else.

This opinion surfaced in one of our focus groups, and we cannot say how widespread it is. It appeared to reflect, however, a strain of feeling among some GAIN workers that potential participants were escaping welfare-to-work requirements too easily. We did not, however, specifically solicit comments on exemptions. In future research we will look more closely at which participants are being granted exemptions and why.

Ambivalent Reactions to Appraisal

In our focus groups, both participants and GSWs expressed mixed feelings about the Appraisal. Participants told us that, on the whole, GSWs had treated them with understanding and respect in these sessions. Some of the same participants, however, complained that they felt rushed to accept and sign an agreement with GAIN that they did not fully understand. The GSWs said they empathized with the participants, given their situations and the obstacles they face. The GSWs also reported concerns about increases in their caseloads that, they felt, kept them from being able to respond fully to participants’ needs.

Much More Respect

As we noted earlier, participants felt very favorable towards GAIN Regional Offices in comparison to CalWORKs District Offices. They were particularly enthusiastic about how they were treated personally.

They didn't treat us like we were lesser people because we're in hard times. And I just felt, you know, I didn't feel degraded at all. And like at the County offices, a lot of times, they make you feel very degraded. [In background: "Absolutely."] And I didn't feel that today.

All of our GAIN focus group participants had attended Orientation at a GAIN Regional Office rather than at a CalWORKs District Office—what is referred to in lexicon of participants variously as “AFDC,” “DPSS,” or the “County Office.”

Olivia: If you do a comparison, though, on the Eligibility Workers—the workers here and the workers at AFDC, I mean—these are way up there.

Participant: They are a lot better here. These workers here are a lot better than DPSS, a whole lot better. Their understandings are better.

Moderator: You're treated with more respect?

Participant: You are, much more respect.

In the same group, another participant noted,

These are new people now, they're different from the ones we dealt with before. Whereas you didn't feel like you were at the County office... This time I felt more comfortable with every, with my caseworker, with the ladies in there. I mean, it was just, what can I say, it was a whole, totally different atmosphere.

There was a collective perception that what was good about GAIN was that they were treated as if they were at an employment agency seeking a job rather than at a welfare office, stigmatized and begging for their daily bread. This participant focuses on the aspects of the interview that were similar to what would happen at an employment agency:

They ask you “what type of job would you like to get into?” Like me, you know, and I told them I’d like to do home care.

Some participants also liked the fact that the process went quickly:

Moderator: What about your meeting with the GSW, I mean, was that satisfactory? They were fairly short meetings, but, I mean...

Kristal: Yeah, that’s what I like about it, it was short and fast. As soon as I got here. [Agreement in background.]

Feeling Rushed

Not all participants were pleased with the speed of the Appraisal process. While participants appreciated the differences between the GAIN Regional Offices and CalWORKs District Offices, the participants who voiced concerns about their experiences were those whose needs and expectations went beyond the *work first* approach. These participants wanted their GSWs to put paperwork aside, and discuss issues other than the goal of getting them placed immediately into a job, any job.

Socorro: I didn’t like it because, well, the way she came at me. Like you’d better come down, you’d better, and the papers.

Selma: Shove them to you, sign here.

Socorro: Wait a minute, I’m signing them and she’s still shoving more papers in my face.

Olivia expresses the feelings of others when she said that such experiences led them to feel like they were being “treated like cattle”:

Olivia: It’s like moving cattle. [Laughter and agreement in background.] Herd us all. They pull you right out of the stocks, they brand you.

The Contract

The feeling of being hurried along and pressured was particularly acute with regard to the welfare-to-work “contract”—the Rights and Responsibilities form that Louise, our fictional participant, had been presented with. The participant, for example, who earlier said that she felt better about coming to GAIN than the CalWORKs office, nonetheless felt rushed in the Appraisal and pressured to sign the contract.

Olivia: I just had an experience that I did not care for at all. And it’s like, um, what is the first thing that they teach you when you are signing a contract is to read the damn thing. And, um, first she told me to read it. And I said, okay. But see, I’m not, like if I don’t understand something, I’m going over it again. She told me to hurry up and sign it before I was even finished, “Oh, you don’t have to bother with that.” And I said, “No, I have to read that. That’s something I do.”

For some, the failure of GAIN to recognize and respond to individual differences, needs, and concerns made their participation in the program very difficult. The needs of the illiterate and those who did not speak English, for example, were not, in late 1998, handled to the satisfaction of all our focus group participants.

I’m going to say it right now, I don’t know how to read very well. I dropped out in 8th grade ... I don’t know how to read what you guys, what they gave me. [But] I signed it.

... [I said,] “I can’t sign this because I don’t know what I’m, I don’t understand it.” ... I can’t speak English. I don’t think I can get a job. [To] GAIN, I said “Please, could you guys help me out? Give me some help.”

The failure to take differences into consideration created similar barriers for other Spanish-speaking participants such as Maceo:

The interview consisted of that they told me about the contract, that I had to come on January 1 for three to four weeks to GAIN. That was all they told me. Then they told I had to sign this. I asked her, “How am I going to know what it says there.” She told me that she will read it to me. How do I know that you are going to tell me the truth? I told her that I’m not going to sign something that I don’t understand. Because it was in English, and I don’t read it.

DPSS has subsequently distributed Spanish-language contracts to some but not all offices.

Individual Attention and GSW-Participant Relationships

It bears repeating that late 1998 was a particularly stressful time for DPSS. Under intense pressure to enroll and process a large number of new participants before the January 1, 1999 deadline, it is likely that GSWs felt compelled to minimize the time spent with any one participant. These pressures should have eased considerably with the deadline having been met. In addition, new GAIN offices will open in the near future, and DPSS has proposed in its 1999-2000 fiscal year budget to reduce the ratio of participants to GSWs by hiring more GSWs.

At the time of our interviews, however, GSWs reported serious concerns about the quality of their contacts with participants. Some told us of increased caseloads, which, in some instances, had more than doubled in recent months. Heavy caseloads,

coupled with responsibilities for coordinating services, meant that GSWs lacked the time to give individual attention to participants:

You know, I don't have time to talk with people. You know, I don't have time to get the phone calls, just give me the message, let me try to help. You know, let me talk to the child care person, the child care babysitter, the provider, the license, the people that hook up the child care. I don't have time for the person.

Another GSW compared the work to being on an assembly line:

Sometimes I feel like I'm on an assembly line, that I'm just here to see numbers, you know, the number. But the people, as far as getting around to motivating them and having that one-on-one lengthy interchange doesn't come into play anymore due to the fact that it seems like we're on like an assembly line process. You know, get them in, get them assigned to the next activity, move on, move on, move on. And it just goes on and on and on like that.

While GSWs had heavy caseloads before the advent of welfare reform, in the post-welfare reform period new regulations limit their flexibility in managing the load.

[B]efore welfare reform, you had certain deferrals or you had certain categories that you put them in that you didn't have, you could get them out of your file or deferred so you weren't actively working on them. Now there's none of that, so every case you get for the day, you're actively working on. And not only that, you don't close them after they get a job. You're still working on them after they get a job. So, you don't get any respite of getting the cases out unless they qualify for an exemption or they are non-compliant until the end of the non-compliance.

Their ever-growing case files, reported another GSW, meant that "We really don't have time" to spend with the participants. This contrasted to the past, when "It was

personal.” The GSW suggested that successes achieved earlier in the GAIN program, when there was more time to establish relationships with participants, were no longer possible.

You had time with that person to let them know that you’re not just pushing them out the door as a number, something they’ve been used to—herding in and herding out. But you had time to sit own and listen to their situation or feel empathy or compassion towards their situation. This made them feel, “Oh, you’re the first one I’ve ever had to listen to me or talk to.” So, it came back to the point where you got a little bit more from them because they seen you were giving them a little more than they ever had before from the Department of Social Services. Or, if they’ve been in it for a long time, from what they’ve seen. It was different. The office is different. This is a nice building. “You’re so nice, you answered your phone.” ...But, we don’t have that no more. But when I did have that, I was able to get people to say, “Thank you.” And I was also able to do things personally, like, you know, direct them to jobs that maybe they didn’t see downstairs on the bulletin board.

The GSW recounted with pleasure a story (too long to include here) about reuniting a husband and wife through GAIN.

And they just sent me a thank you card, a thank you note saying how thankful they were. It’s been a long time since I had someone come in, “You took all that time to do something other than County work, and that put my family back together.”

It became clear during the focus groups that participants appreciated those who, in spite of the pressures to fill quotas, were nonetheless able to take personal considerations into account. They felt especially pleased when workers showed flexibility in how they applied the rules, as the following discussion suggests.

Participant: My worker was very understanding. He gave me a letter to take to my doctor and to have her sign it because he doesn't want to have to put me through this. You know, he's not going to do it. Because he, you can see my hands are all swollen by now, by being here all day. My face is all red.

Kristal: Mine wasn't there, so I left a message and she never returned my call. But now, since I met her face-to-face and talked to her, she seemed cool. She seemed like a cool lady, you know. I can talk to her about my problems. She won't type them down or write them down.

Participant: Nor hang up either.

Lily: Yeah, they look you straight in the face and talk to you like a person, not a number.

Nelda: They do seem really sensitive and concerned.

Wanda: Yeah, this office.

An ability to show understanding seemed to be a crucial aspect of participants' positive evaluations of their contacts with GSWs. This requires that the GSW recognize the difficulties participants face in their lives and provide empathy and support.

I think language is one of the ones, the points that they come up, "Well, I can't speak English, I don't think I can get a job..." What GAIN is saying, get a job, go to school at night, and, of course, they have children and what have you... ..I'll say, "Well, especially in this Southern California area, there's a lot of jobs and there's a lot of supervisors with the Spanish language. A lot of companies, a lot of agencies that adapt to the languages of the area, I have a lot of Spanish speaking, Spanish only, with very limited English that do get that job. They have that, what would I tell them is in Spanish, they have the *ganas*. In other words, they have the will to find that job, and that's the focus on finding a job. And they do. So, it's, I try to encourage, but yet, if you feel like you need to get that little bit of that English command, then there are evening courses to take.

While we heard most often about GSWs efforts to understand the lives of participants, participants also benefited when they could feel empathy with the experiences of GSWs. The willingness of GSWs to share personal aspects of their lives evoked empathy among participants that broke down barriers and helped mitigate the more alienating aspects of their session. As one participant told us,

My worker, she's really nice. She's Cambodian. She talks about her past, too, and how hard it was for her to come to this country not knowing another language. Ah, how she came here from the killing fields. She was just going off, like tears are rolling down my eyes.

Participants appreciated the efforts of GSWs to make human contact, to establish a structure of understanding, and to tailor Appraisal sessions to their individual needs. Participants were often disappointed to find, however, that they could not always get this sort of attention. Even when attention was given, there were limits; the woman quoted directly above ended with the qualification, "The only thing, yeah, they give you a paper, 'just sign here,' 'just sign here.'" With the enrollment deadline having passed, the imminent opening of new GAIN offices, and the proposed increase in GSW staffing, participants may eventually feel this way less often.

Participants Desire More GAIN Flexibility

As noted at the outset, there is a great deal of diversity among any group of welfare recipients. Some are currently employed, but most, while they may have worked in the past, are not. Most face some sort of barriers to work, but those impediments vary in kind and intensity. Some have been on welfare for years, while for a substantial minority of current recipients, welfare represents a sojourn between unstable jobs.

Among our participants, both those with much labor market experience and those with serious skill or other deficits, were frustrated with what they perceived as GAIN's unwillingness to learn about and take account of their individual situation. As a participant with a good deal of labor market experience remarked,

I would think that, um, they should test the people to find out where they are. You know, don't put everyone together. If you got some that have more skills than the other, test those. Help them to find jobs. The ones that don't have the skills or whatever, put them in a training program. I think that would help better than to just bunch everyone because like, in situations where there's people who have skills and people who don't have skills and you in there together, it's boring. It's going to get boring to you because you all ready know these things. So they should test the people to find out where they are.

Some members of our focus groups who had few skills and little work experience expressed parallel sentiments,

Emma: I was disappointed because I thought the GAIN program was to assess the person and then to direct them to a job...I thought they were going to assess people like that. I thought, wow, this is great, it's about time they did something. When I came here and they told me that's all they're going to sit there and tell you have to have confidence in yourself...

Doreen: That's what I basically, I thought maybe that you'd come in and you'd get tested to actually see where you are and then they help you to find a job or whatever the case may be. But I mean, you come in, you're going through three or four hours of Orientation on low self-esteem, high self-esteem, and all that. I mean that's unnecessary.

Another simply added, "You know, I believe this program would work if they were to assess the person as an individual."³⁷

GAIN will in fact conduct a vocational assessment of the individual participant if he or she completes Job Club without finding employment. We found, however, that participants wanted their strengths and needs to be inventoried at the outset of their involvement in GAIN. They did not want to be required to spend three or four weeks first in what might be a fruitless job search. From our perspective, this desire was most pertinent to the least-skilled participants, the people who we would expect to be most at risk of becoming discouraged and dropping out of GAIN before completing Job Club.

Along these lines, the GSW quoted below talks poignantly about the consequences of failing to take basic skills and language differences into account.

I had a recent situation again where the person said, “Well, I don’t know how to read and write.” Sometimes when you hear somebody tell you, “I don’t know how to read and write,” after you hear it so many times, you sort of get jaded about it. But, I mean, the tears just welled up in her eyes. There was something about her that I felt she was being very sincere. I felt so badly for her, but I didn’t have any other alternative. This is where I had to channel her into. And I know that she’s not going to make it. She’s going to fail. So in certain instance, in my view, the system is setting a lot of people up for failure. They don’t know how to read or write in their native language... She doesn’t know any English. And this person is going to fail, I know, but I don’t have any other alternative. And it’s, you know, she was almost on the verge of tears, and I felt, I felt so badly for her. It felt like, I was the big government, with the Big letter G standing over her, listen this is what I have to do, I don’t care anything about your feelings or anything like that. You’re going to go do this, okay, and whether you like it or not. That’s how I felt.

Though torn, she felt compelled to send this unprepared participant through the standard paces. Though GAIN inflexibility is often a reflection of state law, in this case the law does allow leeway. California’s AB1542 allows the County to refer participants

directly to vocational assessment if “at any time the County determines that participation in job search is not likely to lead to employment.”³⁸

A change in GAIN procedures that went into effect during May 1999 partly addresses this problem.³⁹ Under the new procedure, the GAIN Orientation includes a literacy test. The test is scored by the GSW, who forwards the results to the Job Club coordinator. While in Job Club, the low-scoring individuals are offered the option of being on a “dual track,” mixing part-time employment with basic education.

However, for those with adequate skills and greater work experience, there is a risk that they will become frustrated with Job Club and drop out of GAIN before completing this component. Participants were aware of the danger that they could be offered and required to accept a job that was undesirable to them and unrelated to their career aspirations. Program regulations require participants to accept any job they are offered, even those that entail a commute as long as two hours, exclusive of any additional travel necessary to deliver children to school or child care.

The state of California, not DPSS or its Bureau of CalWORKs, created these rules. Still, it should be noted that the rules clearly conflict with the participant’s desire to fulfill his or her own career aspirations. We found most of our participants to be motivated to succeed within GAIN. It remains to be seen, however, whether the participants can maintain their motivation to work if their hopes run contrary to the thrust of the law.

Work First and the Road to Self-sufficiency

Some focus group participants were already skeptical that with hard work and patience GAIN would enable them to achieve self-sufficiency. The early emphasis on self-

esteem and motivation made them suspicious that GAIN would not deliver in the more substantial ways they felt they needed help. As participant Emma observed:

OK, you complete the job program, and then there's no guarantee, although you may be a little bit more equipped to be able to get a job, there's no guarantee that you do. It is a plus, I mean because it is, it helps you build your self-esteem and all that, but I don't know. I just think that there's so many little loopholes.

She had not yet attended the Job Club, but she was already concerned about her employment possibilities.

Those who had been through GAIN already—presumably before the launching of CalWORKs—were even more skeptical. Esteban, who professed a strong desire to work, said, “We know that we are a burden to the government.” Despite these sentiments, he anticipated his second time in GAIN with frustration and mistrust:

The program CalWORKs is great—great talk and little action. The people that shared their words right now [in the focus group] said that everything is fine, but they haven't found out yet. But let's wait a couple weeks until they can see for themselves and they will be in agreement.

The comments of these participants reveal a concern shared by many in the focus groups that the self-sufficiency they desire cannot be achieved by working the entry-level jobs that the program encourages. Indeed, as one participant suggested, the likelihood of achieving self-sufficiency working at one of these jobs is limited: “you can't support a family working at K-Mart unless you have worked there for years and years.”

This outlook led a number of participants to begin the program with a strong commitment to the ends that the GAIN Program was trying to achieve, but with equally strong doubts about whether it provided the means to achieve them. They felt as

Emma, already quoted above, did: “The Program directs you into your long-term goals, but it’s missing something. It cuts short of what it needs to help to really get you there.”

Others were particularly concerned about time limits. Like most of the people with whom we spoke—participants and staff alike—our focus group participants appeared to misunderstand the 18/24-month limit on aid. For instance, one woman told us that,

The only part [of the Program] I don’t agree with was the part about people working minimum wage jobs and two years was going to cut them off or something like that. I mean, a minimum job, how in two years they barely like to give you raises. I mean, how could you just possibly say you just gonna be off of welfare in that period of time on a minimum wage job?

The program does not in fact require participants to become self-sufficient within two years. The 18/24-month limit is the maximum amount of time the participant can be aided only if she is not either working or participating in community service employment for the required number of hours per week. As long as she is employed or in community service, she can continue on aid, up until the sixty-month lifetime limit. However, as a recent report on welfare-to-work in Los Angeles reiterated, there is little evidence that more than a small fraction of participants will be able to reach self-sufficiency within even five years.⁴⁰

We found widespread agreement among focus group members that the limitations placed on education and employment training were ways in which the program “cuts short of what it needs to help to really get you out there.” A number of participants pointed to the link between their ability to get only low paying, dead end

jobs and a lack of training. In some cases this connection was reinforced by the experiences of others they know in the program:

I've talked to some of the other girls who have been through the Program, this particular program, and they said that no, they haven't gone to school because of the fact that they don't facilitate [that] at all any more. They want you to work, period. If on your own time you can go to night school or something, then good luck.

In some cases, knowing others for whom schooling had led to good jobs reinforced the connection between education and self-sufficiency.

Esteban: What I was looking for from GAIN was a resource that could motivate us. Well, it does motivate us, improve our self-esteem to go forward, but we have the handcuffs on. We need to study. I have a friend that they sent to study. Now he's earning \$18 to \$22 an hour. In what, welding. Why would he need welfare? That's what we need. In the last class, I told the person that was talking to us, "The talk is beautiful, but what we want is to study." I gave him the example: "Why can't she [his wife] study cosmetology? Give her the cosmetology course, and she can get her diploma in cosmetology. She could get two or three other persons that would be on welfare to go to work with her. Then they wouldn't need welfare." That's what we really want, that they help us to study. But they've taken our study away from us.

Using the example of his friend, Esteban made a case for how training could make his wife self-sufficient. This link led to heightened expectations for what the program should offer. Without these possibilities he, like numerous other participants, felt his "hands were tied." A number of participants made the connection not only between the likelihood of receiving a living wage if they followed the program but also between the temporary nature of many of these jobs and long-term self-sufficiency:

Selma: They gotta allow you at some point to save money. If you don't put money away, you know, once you get laid off from the job or fired or something, you're right back on welfare.

The link between the ability to acquire education and their ability to become self-sufficient leads some to talk not in terms of getting a job but of attaining a career. This means that some participants wanted their next steps to entail more than simply doing whatever it takes to get off welfare. Like many in the middle classes, they aspired to fulfilling careers:

Estela: Yeah, because this job at K-Mart and Mervyn's, these are all like part-time jobs. You don't want a part-time job.

Charelle: You want a career.

Estela: You want to be happy with your job and continue to go to your job. Not something you're going to be unhappy.

Charelle: You're right, but they told us that we cannot get part-time jobs. The minimum amount of hours is 32 hours.

Estela: But what if you're not happy? What if the people don't like the way you do the work?

As described earlier in the report, participants who began Self-Initiated Programs (SIPs) prior to their entry into GAIN were able, given GAIN approval, to use their SIP as a primary welfare-to-work activity. Misunderstandings of the SIP program led many GSWs to reject SIPs that actually met CalWORKs requirements based on the length of the program or the occupation that the program had as its end point. To amend these problems, earlier this year DPSS sent a letter to all recipients inviting them to resubmit their requests for SIP approval.

The rejection of many SIPs seems to have led to the mistaken impression that DPSS would only support schooling if it were explicitly assigned by GAIN.

Olivia: Okay, when she was talking about they don't support people in school. Okay, they have a thing here, if you're already going to school, you're called a SIP, which is a Self-Initiated Program. And they don't even, if they put you to school, if they tell you to go down to the adult school, they pay for your books, they pay for your child care, they pay for everything. But if you're Self-Initiated, you don't get anything.

Olivia's assertion, however, was only true of SIPs that were rejected by DPSS. Another of our focus group participants may have been a victim of a GSW's misunderstanding of the SIP time restrictions. Wanda was told—inappropriately, as far as we can tell—that she would have to drop her plans to attend college in order to be a teacher and should instead pursue a brief training program to prepare her for employment as a day care worker.

She [the GAIN Services Worker] told me, “You're going to have to re-tailor your schedule to suit, you know, something that's going to give you a certificate in two years.” But I'm [not interested in] early childhood development. I don't want to teach small kids.

For Wanda, this brought up a larger set of issues concerning welfare, work, and opportunity.

[T]hey're missing the whole point. That's why a lot of people are on assistance, maybe because no one has given them the opportunity to do what they really want to do. They need to find out what people really want to do and then maybe help them in that particular direction. I mean, to go out and get a job, okay, I can get a job one day, and just not be happy at that job and not go back. And so then we're right back (lots of agreement on this). They have to find out what everyone's niche is first and then help them find out.

In any event, for those in an approved SIP, their status would count as a valid welfare-to-work activity for the duration of their 18 or 24-month time limit. Beyond the limit, participants would be required to meet work requirements, but would not be forced to abandon their educational program. The time limit still worried some, such as Kristal, who wanted to take longer courses.

Kristal: I think they want you to get a job first because of the 24 month limit or whatever. So when you have a job, you feel like, well, if I have a job, then I can go to night school. But if you want to go to school right now, and then your 24 months is up, then what you going to do? You're still going to the school, and you ain't going to be able to pay your lights and your gas or feed your baby.

Whether the issue is one of achieving economic self-sufficiency or of building a career, many participants felt that what they needed was job training and education. While it may be unrealistic to expect that all GAIN participants would benefit from—or even want—additional education and training, our focus group participants communicated a consensus that self-sufficiency comes out of finding stable jobs that pay a living wage, and that those good jobs are only open to those with sufficient skills and learning. To these participants, going from welfare-to-work did not simply entail taking jobs that would enable them to get off welfare; they also wanted training and education in order to stay off welfare.

As noted earlier, participant responses to the Orientation and Appraisal turned again and again to concerns about (a) how they would care for their children while in the program and (b) GAIN's ability to help them get jobs that would improve the well-being of their families. The persistence with which participants voiced these concerns signifies that meaningful evaluation of CalWORKs must include more than a narrow

focus on technical features of the program, such as the substantive content of the Orientation. Participants bring their own concerns, goals, and expectations to the welfare-to-work process. Evaluation of the program must include a focus on how well staff understand and are able to incorporate what participants bring to the process.

Summary

Both participant and GSW reactions to their initial meetings held after the Orientation were mixed. Participants felt positive when GSWs made an effort to take participants' personal circumstances and needs into consideration. They also appreciated it when GSWs extended themselves in some personal way. Participants felt more negative when they were given little information and when they felt rushed or pressured to sign a welfare-to-work contract. Participants—and many GSWs—felt that meaningful assistance could only come in the context of a relationship in which a participant's needs were understood and flexibly addressed. They articulated a preference for a differential system that would recognize the heterogeneity of participants.

The views of staff were generally complementary to those of the participants. Members of both GSW and GAIN Services Supervisor (GSS) focus groups recognized that a successful Appraisal required more than simply screening for special services, getting the contract signed, and making a referral to Job Club. Rather, they felt that the character and quality of the participant-GSW relationship was crucial to their ability to assist participants in moving from welfare-to-work. They were unhappy that caseloads had increased dramatically due to the pressure to meet the January 1, 1999, deadline for signing up participants. The heavy caseloads meant that little time was available for each participant, requiring that Appraisal sessions focus narrowly on the steps necessary to enlist the participant in the program.

V. REMOVING BARRIERS TO WORK

An essential part of CalWORKs is the provision of “supportive services” to remove barriers that prevent participants from searching for, finding, or continuing to hold jobs. Many of these services, such as child care assistance, are available only to the currently employed and those involved in welfare-to-work activities. The supportive services for mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence, however, are available to all.⁴¹ To distinguish them from the others, we refer to these last three services as *special services*. As we conducted our research in late 1998, we identified participant needs and procedural difficulties with some of the supportive services.⁴² The following section deals with the needs and difficulties that existed in 1998 in the provision of child care and special services. We also note innovations, promising practices, and planned improvements in these services.

Child Care Needs, Difficulties, and Innovations

While DPSS had in the past assisted welfare-to-work and already-employed participants with child care costs, CalWORKs called for new procedures and a large increase in the number of participants needing to be served. Previously, recipients had been directly or indirectly⁴³ reimbursed for child care costs. Under CalWORKs, however, most child care providers are to be paid directly. Furthermore, AB1542 introduced a confusing three-stage system of child care provision, with the local welfare agency in charge of only the first stage. Stages 2 and 3 are handled by Resource and Referral/Alternative Payment Program (R&R/APP) agencies approved by the California Department of Education.

Exercising an option available under the law, DPSS contracted with the R&R/APPs to handle referrals and process payments for stage 1 child care in addition to stages 2 and 3. Stage 1 provides care for the children of parents who are participating in welfare-to-work activities or who are working but are not yet stably employed. Late 1998 was a transitional period, with DPSS still engaged in transferring responsibility for stage 1 child care to the R&R/APPs. While this was an important transition, it need not have had a large effect on line staff or participants—the main responsibility of line staff with regard to child care remains the initial processing of applications.

Child Care Needs

In our surveys of GAIN participants, we asked about child care arrangements and needs (see Table 13). Most GAIN participants (91%) reported having been made aware that child care assistance would be available for their young children as they began working or participating in welfare-to-work activities. Almost all participants said that the explanation of the system was clear (86%). Most of the participants (93%) did have children who were under age thirteen and were thus eligible for assistance.

The GAIN participants who responded to our survey tended to be relatively new to the program. This may be why less than half (35%) reported having child care arrangements in place at the time they were interviewed. Three-quarters (75%) of those who did have existing arrangements reported that their arrangements were adequate for the moment.

Eight of the participants (14%) had asked GAIN for help in finding a child care provider. Since one-third of the GAIN participants already had child care

arrangements in place, it is not surprising that those who asked for payment assistance outnumbered those who asked for referrals.

Table 13. Experiences with Child Care Procedures and Arrangements, 1998

	GAIN		CalWORKs	
	Participants		Recipients	
	Percent	# of	Percent	# of
	“Yes”	Responses	“Yes”	Responses
Aware that child care assistance was available	91%	59	70%	147
Staff explanation of child care assistance was				
clear	86%	53	86%	105
Has children under 13	93%	56	96%	147
Has current child care arrangements	35%	56	29%	147
Current arrangements are adequate ¹	75%	20	71%	43
Has requested assistance <i>finding</i> child care ²	14%	43	7%	123
Requested assistance <i>paying</i> for child care	34%	53	21%	141
Has completed child care assistance forms	72%	18	67%	30

Source: URD GAIN Participant and CalWORKs Recipient Surveys, 1998

¹ Applies to those who have current child care arrangements.

² Applies to those who do not currently have child care or who are unhappy with their current arrangements.

CalWORKs recipients who are working (and meet income requirements) are also eligible for child care assistance. In our surveys of CalWORKs recipients, we found that a smaller proportion had been informed by their worker about the availability of child care assistance than was the case among GAIN participants (70% vs. 91%). Most of those who were told about child care assistance, however, felt that the explanation of the service was clear (86%). Like GAIN participants, most CalWORKs

recipients had children under the age of thirteen (96%). Less than 30% of the recipients had current child care arrangements and most of those recipients found their arrangements adequate (71%). At the time of the survey, only eight (7%) of the CalWORKs recipients in our sample had asked DPSS for help in *finding* child care. Thirty (21%) recipients had asked for assistance in *paying for* child care, however. Of those thirty, two-thirds had completed the application form.

Some EWs felt that they did not have sufficient information on hand for recipients needing child care assistance. Intake Eligibility Workers are usually the first to speak in depth with a new recipient. One Intake EW told us “We need more pamphlets or phone numbers of [R&R/APPs] to give to the clients.” Another suggested “Maybe we should have a list of places that they can call directly versus a 1-800 number” because of problems with the toll-free service. Our interviews with CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants, however, did not suggest that they had encountered significant problems getting referrals to providers.

Existing Arrangements and Concerns

Table 14 shows the arrangements of GAIN participants and CalWORKs recipients who had already arranged for child care. Out of the 22 GAIN participants who reported having existing arrangements, most were relying on family (41%) or friends or neighbors (23%) rather than institutional providers. Of the 36 GAIN participants who were either looking for a provider or considering a change in providers, fully half (50%) said they would choose family, while a smaller number (11%) said they would choose friends or neighbors. CalWORKs recipients with existing arrangements were even more likely than GAIN participants to rely on family (48%) and friends or neighbors (28%). Among CalWORKs recipients, either looking for a provider or considering a change in providers, the choices they reported were almost identical to those made by

GAIN participants: 49% choosing family, and 14% choosing friends or neighbors. This is consistent with a new *Los Angeles Times* poll of 1,601 parents statewide which found that two-thirds of the respondents preferred leaving their child in the care of relatives over other arrangements.⁴⁴

Table 14. Current Child Care Arrangements of GAIN Orientation and CalWORKs Recipients, 1998

	Currently Using ...		If County Paid, Would Use ...	
	GAIN Recipients	CalWORKs Participants	GAIN Recipients	CalWORKs Participants
	Family	41%	48%	50%
Friends/Neighbors	23%	29%	11%	14%
Daycare Center/Other	36%	25%	39%	37%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
# of Responses	22	42	36	116

Source: URD GAIN Participant and CalWORKs Recipient Surveys, 1998

Notes: We counted responses of “school”, “church”, and “YMCA” as “daycare center/other” responses. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

When participants discussed their decision to use a license-exempt provider with our survey interviewers or in our focus groups, their fears about molestation and improper discipline in institutional providers clearly played an important role. This was not a concern about DPSS-funded child care *per se*, but about providers in general. One participant in a focus group lamented that “It’s really hard to find good day care. Where they’re not going to beat your [child] because they’re crying.” A participant in another focus group who confided that “there’s been several members of my family that

have been molested in day care,” was concerned about leaving her infant son with *anyone* before he was old enough to speak.

And I at least want to give my child the chance to talk and let me know, “Oh, mommy, somebody hit me.” But I can’t do that now. Now, I have to go to a licensed day care that I don’t know. My son can’t tell me cuz he can’t talk. So, I mean I’ve seen things on TV that these crazy things happen especially to the kids that are younger that can’t talk.

Not entirely separate were concerns about the availability (and cost) of child care for children with special needs. Noting that “They give you transportation and child care and stuff like that,” a focus group participant asked “but I mean what is \$3.38 an hour for someone that is going to watch a child that is ... hyperactive?” There seemed to be confusion among participants about how much would be paid for child care and whether it would cover the care of children with special needs. In our GAIN participant focus groups, however, participants discussed child care availability and pay rates, reaching consensus that GAIN child care was flexible with regard to payment levels and responsive to special needs.

Application Procedures Complex and Cumbersome

Both participants and staff complained that the procedures for securing child care were complex and time-consuming. Requesting funding for child care required that the recipient correctly complete a long and complex application form. The application was particularly problematic for non-English-speaking participants, who had to contend with English-only forms.

Asked if child care processing was indeed a problem, GAIN Services Workers in one focus group responded in the affirmative. One told us that for both participants and GSWs, “it is a real headache.” Another explained that many problems stemmed

from the fact that “the application is complicated.” The GSW added that this was true “especially for the Hispanic people. They don’t know how to read in English. It’s only in English.” These opinions were supported by our survey of GAIN staff. When asked how they would improve the child care process, 31% of GSWs interviewed stated they would simplify child care by revising applications and invoice forms. As of May 1999, instruction sheets for the child care applications and invoices are now available in multiple languages. The forms themselves are still in English only. Although the content of the application has not been revised, a multi-lingual version (including Spanish, Armenian, Korean, and other languages) has been circulating within DPSS pending approval.

GSWs at another office complained that GEARS (the GAIN computer system) made the application process even more difficult and time-consuming.

The process to authorize the child care on the computer is such a cumbersome system. ... There are so many steps that you need to take just to get the child care authorized on the computer ... and if you have three or four applications that you need to authorize for on the computer, that takes a couple of hours sometimes. OK? Because you’re answering the phones or whatever, and you really need to pay attention to the dates that you’re inputting and things like that. ... So that in itself takes a lot of time.

In general, Eligibility staff had less involvement with child care processing than did GSWs. Until recently, requests for child care by employed parents who were not in GAIN were handled differently and given a lower priority than were those who were in GAIN. At the time of our survey interviews with EWs, child care processing for non-GAIN cases was still in transition. It is possible that the transition itself led to the concerns EWs related to us. EWs felt that there was a need for more staff to deal with child care, to handle applications in particular. The EW who told us that child care

requests were “not handled fast enough” was not atypical. Another EW suggested that “We need a child care agency on site to handle child care requests expeditiously.” Towards this end, the R&R/APPs have since allocated staff members to each CalWORKs District Office and GAIN Regional Office.

Table 15. Staff Methods for Processing Child Care Requests, 1998

	Eligibility	GAIN Services
	Workers	Workers
<i>How are participants' child care requests handled?¹</i>		
Explain services and process applications	2%	33%
Refer all requests to R&R/APPs	5%	16%
Provide application and review it only	0%	39%
All applications to Child Care Coordinator	63%	0%
Don't know process	21%	0%
Other	9%	12%
Total	100%	100%

Source: URD Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

¹ Responses to this open-ended question were coded by URD.

Table 15 shows the various ways in which GAIN and Eligibility staff handled child care requests in late 1998. It is apparent that, in this early phase of program implementation, there was no single, systematic way of handling child care applications. This was especially true among GAIN Services Workers. One third of the GSWs (33%) stated that they explained the services and processed license-exempt care applications only. Another third (39%) provided participants with the application and

reviewed it before sending it elsewhere, and a smaller number (16%) said that they referred all requests for child care directly to the R&R/APPs.

Eligibility Workers appeared to be more consistent in their handling child care requests. Nearly two-thirds (63%) stated they sent completed applications to an EW who had been designated their Child Care Coordinator. On the other hand, one-fifth (21%) reported that they did not know how applications were supposed to be handled.

Official child care application procedures have changed substantially since late 1998. As noted above, application and invoice instructions have been translated into other languages, and a multi-lingual application is in the works. Starting in February 1999, R&R/APP staff have been co-located in all CalWORKs District and GAIN Regional Offices. They have made more informational materials available, and they attend CalWORKs intakes and GAIN Orientation sessions to inform participants about their child care options. Plans are also under way to transition most stage 1 child care cases from DPSS to the R&R/APPs in the near future. The goals behind these changes are to make the application process easier for participants, and to lessen the burden of child care processing on CalWORKs and GAIN staff. In future data collection efforts, we will look at how participants and staff evaluate these changes.

Delays for Processing and Payment

Although recipients are expected to begin participation in work-related activities immediately on entry into GAIN, participants reported that they frequently endured long delays before their child care applications were processed. Participants also reported that their providers were not always paid promptly.

Some of the GSWs in our focus groups confirmed that, as of late 1998, the processing of child care applications could be very slow. The GSW quoted below

detailed some of the problem areas. First, the GSW addressed the process of applying for child care payments.

It takes such a long time to even start the process. Give them [participants] the paperwork, and they give it to you. If it's completed, you forward it to the person so they can approve the child care. If it's not completed, they send it back to you to send it back to be completed.

After the application was approved, it came back to the GSW.

Then you have to sit down and go into the computer and authorize them [the provider] to start getting the invoices. So that's about a week turnover. Once that person gets it, turn it in, if they fill it out completed they will get their check, maybe, a week and a half or two weeks later. If they don't fill it out correctly, the invoice goes back to them and then it goes back to the people who get them paid. So we are talking about maybe ... [In background: "Six weeks."] ... two months. [In background: "Or even longer than that."]

GSWs confirmed that there were significant problems with processing invoices, and therefore real difficulties for participants who would need to ensure payment for the child care providers they were using.

[The] invoices are terrible. Even the people that are licensed to take care of children, they don't know how to complete the invoices. They'll call me on the phone, "What am I supposed to put here?" And they have instructions, but it's complicated. To me, when I first began here, I had to go through it a couple of times before I could figure out how to do it. So for them, especially for the Spanish-speaking people, it's just, they don't complete it right. And they're not getting the money on time.

The CalWORKs recipients in our survey interviews who were receiving child care assistance complained of similar problems with payments. From the few in the

sample who had applied for payment assistance, we were told that “payments weren’t coming”, “they don’t pay her [provider] on time”, and “no payments have been on time.”

Eligibility Workers, particularly those in the Earned Income units, also observed problems with payments. These workers have direct contact with working participants who rely on DPSS child care assistance to allow them to work. Welfare workers participating in our surveys made the following observations and suggestions:

Approved EW: Child care has to be fixed. They need to give workers power to reimburse clients on site. With appropriate guidelines, of course.⁴⁵

Approved EW: If they had a system that would separate child care [parent requests] from the monthly report, child care payments could happen faster.

Approved EW: Lots of clients complained of deferred [delayed] payments.

Intake EW: Processing time takes too long. I know of some participants who haven’t been paid in 2-3 months.

These delays in payments resulted in participants who were hesitant to apply because of providers who were suspicious of the DPSS payment process. As two Eligibility Workers noted in one of our focus groups:

Intake EW: I have clients who get jobs but can’t get providers because the provider fears they won’t get paid. We also need a letter that lets provider know they will get paid.

Approved EW: With respect to child care, that month you have to wait for [child care] payment to kick in, the participant has to pay until that happens. This creates a hardship for the participant. The provider always wants the money up front. Something should happen to make it faster.⁴⁶

Supervisors often acted as trouble-shooters, aiding GSWs when they encountered problems they could not solve on their own. The supervisors told us that child care, after sanctions, was their top problem area. Beyond the problems with complicated paperwork and difficult computer systems mentioned by GSWs, there were child care difficulties that DPSS had no control over.

One such area was the payment of a child care provider who cares for a participant's children in the participant's home. In these cases, DPSS paid the participant, and the participant in turn paid the provider.⁴⁷ When the participant pays the in-home provider, the participant arguably becomes the provider's employer under the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). As an employer, the participant acquires certain responsibilities, including the need to pay minimum wage. The reimbursement rate for a single child, however, was less than the minimum wage in California. A GAIN Services Supervisor in one of our focus groups expressed her frustration with this situation:

One thing that, I mean, I don't like personally because — and this is just my opinion — is that participants who have their babysitters at their house, they are required to pay the minimum wage because they are considered employers. [They] are employers and they are supposed to pay the minimum wage when GAIN doesn't pay the minimum wage. ... And as a matter of fact, the highest rate for participants is, I don't think it's over three dollars an hour. And yeah, we, the law requires the participants to pay \$5.75 to the babysitters. And, which I think that's totally unfair because not even the licensed providers get paid hourly \$5.75, and yet we require our participants to pay, which they don't because it's kinda like, it's confusing. ... So I think something's wrong with that, with that law. And I think there should be an exemption with that law when the participant has their babysitters at their house that they shouldn't be required to pay the \$5.75 because not even the licensed provider gets \$5.75 per hour.

At this time, DPSS was beginning to move towards a system where all requests and payments would be handled by external contractors called Resource and Referral/Alternative Payment Program (R&R/APP) agencies. The R&R/APP agencies were concerned about the legal repercussions of paying for in-home license-exempt providers, and were not then handling those providers. We have not been able to determine what proportion of exempt providers perform their services in the homes of participants.

A complicating factor is the relationship of the R&R/APPs with the California Department of Education (CDE). For DPSS, child care is a utilitarian service, provided to parents to help them move into the labor market. For CDE, however, the educational quality of child care services is a paramount concern. State law emphasizes parental choice of child care providers, and this is DPSS policy. The legal complications caused by in-home child care providers combined with the commitments of the R&R/APPs apparently led to confusion among DPSS staff about where the department's priorities lay. A GAIN Services Supervisor who specialized in child care expressed this confusion:

Emma: It appears that the goal is to remove everybody from exempt child care. You know, family members, friends, whatever, to licensed. I think that's unfair. I think that the uh, participant or whoever needs the child care should have the choice. Someone more comfortable with family members because they haven't left their children with anyone. And I don't feel that they should be pushed toward licensed. Um, that's one of the issues.

Moderator: Why is that pushed? Do you understand that?

Emma: I don't know. I don't know if they feel, um, that licensed child care provide a safer environment or a better environment for the children. You know a lot of times, licensed feel that if they're with grandmother or auntie that the children are just watching TV and

they're not really give, being given the education type tools that they need for like, preschool. Um, I guess. I don't know. But still, even though they're pushing, we have a lot of participants who are still leaning toward the exempt provider because they feel more comfortable.

Clearly, one reason that child care assistance is regarded as so problematic is because it is on one hand so sensitive—parents need to feel that their children are being given safe, quality care—and because it is so central to the mission of CalWORKs. DPSS managers were aware of problems with application and invoice processing. DPSS attributed most ongoing delays in invoice processing to problems with the invoice itself. Provider errors in completion of the invoice could clearly have led to late payments. Likewise, inconsistencies between the child care use reported by the participant and that reported by the provider would have slowed invoice processing.

Innovative After School Enrichment Program

DPSS has taken a number of significant steps to increase the availability of child care services. In 1998, the Board of Supervisors approved \$1.9 million for a DPSS plan to build child care capacity in the County. The plan included efforts to recruit new providers, perform a Needs Assessment, conduct a survey of child care providers in the County, and more.

Starting in June 1998, DPSS chaired a child care planning committee that involved Every Mother is a Working Mother, the Child Care Planning Committee, the Antelope Valley Unified School District, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), LACOE, and others. The committee developed an innovative child care program, working with the state to secure funding. The After School Enrichment Program they developed will provide educational, health, social, recreational, and cultural programs at each of 225 elementary schools. These schools were identified as

being from high need areas—areas having the highest concentrations of CalWORKs-aided children. DPSS has contracted with LAUSD to provide the services at 100 schools, while LACOE has a contract to oversee the remaining 125. DPSS will work together with LAUSD and LACOE to select the specific schools.

Providing Access to Special Services

Assuring that those who need mental health, substance abuse, or domestic violence services receive them requires a process by which those in need are identified. DPSS has mailed notices, made brochures available, put up posters in its offices, and had staff disseminate information in an effort to make CalWORKs recipients aware that they can ask for these services. For a variety of reasons, recipients may be reluctant to simply identify themselves as being in need. To help identify more of those requiring special services, GAIN Services Workers and Intake Eligibility Workers now ask new recipients and participants questions from a standard screening instrument on mental health and substance abuse. They also present the new person with an informational sheet on domestic violence, and ask if there is a domestic violence problem in the family. As detailed in the following section, GSWs expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the screening.

Once those in need are tentatively identified, they must be expeditiously referred for evaluation and treatment. Long delays between identification and evaluation or treatment may lead recipients or participants to refuse treatment. This was a second area about which GSWs were concerned.

Uncomfortable Questions

The mental health and substance abuse screening instrument includes some introductory material designed to explain the instrument and put at ease the person being screened.

As part of the CalWORKs services available to you, I will ask you some questions about substance abuse and mental health to find out if you could benefit from receiving services in these areas. Before we start the questions, I just want you to know that we ask these questions of everybody because we all have fears, worries or troubles that may lead to unwanted drug use, alcohol abuse, medical or social problems. Since problems like these make it hard for people to get or keep a job, these questions will help us decide whether a counselor should talk with you. You may request to speak with a counselor even if we don't find a referral necessary

The questions in the instrument are listed below:

Substance Abuse Questions

1. Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?
2. Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking or drug use?
3. Have you felt bad or guilty about your drinking or drug use?
4. Have you ever had a drink or used drugs first thing in the morning to steady your nerves?

Mental Health Questions

1. Do you have any feelings, fears or worries that interfere with your daily tasks and ability to work?
2. Do you have problems in getting along with others that make it hard for you to work?
3. Have you had thoughts of seriously hurting yourself or other people within the last 6 months?

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4. Have you experienced any severe traumas such as the sudden death of a loved one, witnessed a violent crime, or been personally victimized within the last year that continues to bother or upset you?

When asked in the focus groups how they felt about the screening instrument, some GAIN participants seemed to take the questions in stride. When one participant told us “[they] seem like normal questions to me,” others in the group expressed agreement. There were participants, however, to whom the questions seemed unfairly accusatory.

Jesus: They asked me questions like, “Are you an alcoholic or drug addict?”

Moderator: How did you feel?

Jesus: I felt uncomfortable because I’m an honest person without vices. When they ask questions like that, it makes one feel uncomfortable because one isn’t an alcoholic or drug addict or anything like that. So these are questions that make one feel uncomfortable. But these are their rules.

Though participants largely denied a negative reaction to the screening instrument, GSWs reported otherwise. Some GSWs who participated in our focus groups told us that the questions had a negative impact on the tone of the Appraisal. We first were alerted to this problem by a GSW describing the functions of the Appraisal. After noting that she would “try to evaluate whether the participant might be ill” or was qualified for an exemption, she confided:

I tell you truthfully, I feel very uneasy with this mental health/drug abuse questionnaire that they’ve placed on us to ask. I understand why they might be wanting to know—so we could help—that this is another phase where we could help the participant. But I truthfully feel uncomfortable with the questions. Perhaps the way they’re phrased, I don’t know.

When the focus group moderator asked her to be more specific, the GSW focused on what she felt were disparaging assumptions implied by the questions:

Well, I think one of them says, uh, “The first thing in the morning, do you take a drink or abuse drugs before you start your day?” you know. The questions are posed like, we’re assuming they’re already drinking and have drug and substance abuse.

Another GSW agreed, saying “You know, and it’s sort of like, when did you stop beating your wife?” Another GSW suggested that even trying to screen in this way, regardless of how the questions were worded, would put the participant on the defensive.

[We’re] assuming that because of the socioeconomic level that they find themselves, we’re assuming that they have these problems. That drug abuse, mental health, runs all the gamut, from, you know, it’s just, I feel, well, if I was in their shoes, I would feel insulted. I would.

These assumptions, the GSWs felt, created barriers to meaningful screening. In GAIN, the screening is conducted during the Appraisal, which is usually the first meeting between the GSW and the participant. GSWs were skeptical about the willingness of participants to confide in someone they had just met. A GSW who acknowledged that participants who said “yes” to the questions should be quickly referred for services, added:

But, you know, how many people are actually going to sit in front of—that’s their first day of knowing you—and is going to let you know, “Well, yeah, I’m at home and my husband is beating me.” That’s very rare. ... A few people the survey may help, but the majority of

people, they're not going to be affected because they're [thinking], "I'm not going to tell this perfect stranger as to what is going on in my life."

Not only is the worker asking very personal questions, the same GSW noted, but the answers could have serious consequences for the participant. This is particularly true with regard to substance abuse.

Because they don't know if that information is going to go to social services, are their kids going to get taken away, is their check going to be cut because they're saying they're using substances instead of the money going for food, it's going toward their substance abuse.

Conversely, GSWs' experiences have taught them that they can learn about participants' problems when they have the opportunity to establish trust and show an understanding of participants' circumstances. As one GSW noted, over time, "if you're able to build a rapport with this participant, some meetings down the way," then eventually "you get some of this information."

I did have a participant before the surveys came about, I did have a participant about our third or fourth meeting let me know, "Oh, yea, my boyfriend is in jail. He's the father of this child, and he beat on me." And that's your time, you know, you like to sit there and let them know, you know, there's help out there, let's try to get you the help you need.

GSWs recognized that the relationship they established with a participant was central to their ability to assist that person. Some GSWs felt that the assessment questionnaire created barriers between themselves and participants, making the establishment of rapport and trust more difficult.

Part of our job in trying to help them to find employment is to try to keep them motivated. And sometimes by using the form, like [another GSW] said, it creates a kind of a barrier. They see us as somebody, as a governmental agency sometimes, because these questions are very personal to them.

Workers reported that, at times, they expressed their own feelings about the screening instrument to the participant in an effort to increase rapport and avoid negative consequences. A GSW, who told us that the questions make her “a little uncomfortable,” described how she did this.

I’m very apologetic to the participant. And I just, truthfully, I’ll say, “I have to ask these questions, I feel a little uneasy.” ... It may not be the way it should be done. I just feel very uneasy about the questionnaire.

By framing the experience in these terms, the GSW placed herself on the participant’s side. This could elicit a sympathetic response from the participant. As one GSW told us, ‘They answer it. [They say], “that’s okay, we know it’s your job.” And they kind of help me along with that answer.’ Unfortunately, this may send the wrong message to the participant; a worker who is uncomfortable asking about substance abuse or mental health problems might well be uncomfortable to learn that the participant needs help with one of them.

In fact, there was evidence that some GSWs were *not* comfortable with learning about participants’ substance abuse, mental health, or domestic violence problems. As one GSW said:

We don’t have that kind of background. We don’t have a medical background. We don’t have a psychiatric background to understand these questions or even the answer to them.

So, sometimes it confuses them, and it kind of doesn't help our job and a sense that obviously we're trying to keep them motivated and it makes it difficult...

The sentiment that screening for special services detracted from the GSWs' ability to pursue their employment-centered job tasks was echoed by a number of workers. For example, one GSW protested that:

...half the time you'll be spending your time apologizing for asking the questions ... "Do you drink or take any drugs?" And they say, "No," and you continue on. It's a situation that takes up a lot of valuable time that you could be directing your skills and talents toward the need there is at hand, which is employment.

We cannot say how widespread was the view that special services were a diversion from "the need there is at hand," but several of the GSWs in our focus groups clearly felt that the screening made their jobs more difficult. A GAIN Services Supervisor in one of our focus groups sympathized with GSWs.

I think maybe if we had more training in terms of how to use, you know the screening tool— Although you know, we had a really small training, but I just feel that the workers don't feel it's their job. They're not trained to ask that ... kind of question.

The same GSW quoted directly above suggested another reason for not pursuing the screening as vigorously as possible: DPSS does not acknowledge that GSWs possess the kinds of skills needed to successfully screen participants for special services.

We are social workers but we are not respected as social workers ... So, it makes us not really want to play the ball game of asking our participants to go along with something that we don't feel comfortable with.

The notion that GSWs are social workers but are not given the respect—or pay—normally accorded to social workers surfaced a number of times. We will return to this topic in Section VI “Evolving as an Organization” below.

Referrals

While GSWs tended to focus on their discomfort with the screening questions, they also spoke about procedural issues that arose once candidates for supportive services were identified. One issue had to do with the screening of and referrals for participants who were already receiving treatment on their own or through another program. Another, more commonly mentioned issue, concerned GSWs' difficulties in contacting clinical assessors and service providers.

With regard to participants currently in treatment, a GSW in one of our focus groups observed that they “have their own social workers, they have their own doctors already.” The GSW then added critically, “But we want to do it our own way.”

Another GSW in the group responded:

GSW: That's true. I find there's a duplication of services. They're already in a mental health program or in a domestic violence program or something and then we make them sign our contracts and there's a duplication.

DPSS is aware of this as a problem, and has created procedures to minimize disturbances to participants who are already in treatment.

In any event, difficulty in scheduling appointments for “clinical assessment” for mental health or substance abuse services appeared to be a much more common problem. Eager to get appointments for participants and help them receive the services they needed, GSWs often complained of difficulties getting hold of providers. This resulted in delays in getting referrals for affected participants. According to one GSW, “we lose participants who need these supportive services because we need to schedule appointments days later.”

GAIN workers thought some of these problems could easily be solved. After a long discussion in one Supervisor group about the difficulty of providing special services, one supervisor summed up the objections in the form of recommendations:

I think this is a good program that we have, this mental health, substance abuse. But like everybody here is saying, they need to work with the providers, make sure we get those referrals back, make sure we have a number that there’s always a person there to ask— to answer a question, and to help the participant right away. Because the purpose of having these services is to expedite the process with the participants in helping them in getting to a job and to a career. But it’s— what it’s doing right now is actually delaying our process. Because when we refer a participant to clinical assessment, we don’t get the referrals as soon as possible like we supposed to. Meanwhile we have this participant with nothing in any activity. The problem is the providers are not in play, are not there when we call.

Another supervisor echoed this sentiment:

It’s really kind of difficult in dealing with the supportive services, um, having to call someone [the provider] who’s not there. Our workers get discouraged, we get discouraged, because we’re trying to motivate them [participants] and try to get them up, but it’s just really hard that the workers can’t get through to try to help someone with a supportive services issue.

Some workers suggested locating clinical assessors on-site to help clients who have substance abuse or mental health problems. The Department of Mental Health (DMH) has since stationed mental health clinical assessors in a small number of DPSS offices.⁴⁸ DMH has also made a commitment to add two scheduling clerks to deal with the problem of scheduling appointments for participants.

Promising Practice: Domestic Violence Team

We learned of a longstanding way of dealing with domestic violence cases in one CalWORKs District Office that exemplifies the concept of “promising practice.” Prominent signs throughout the office, including in restrooms, encourage victims of domestic violence to identify themselves to workers. The staff has also provided tear off forms with shelter telephone numbers in each of the women’s restrooms. For the past six years, the office has a Domestic Violence Team made up of Eligibility Workers who received forty hours of training in addition to that normally provided by DPSS. The team handles all domestic violence cases jointly. There is a specialized caseworker in the office, but all potentially sensitive cases are handled on a team basis. When members of the office staff identify potentially dangerous situations, the team takes steps to diffuse them. This high-intensity response contrasts to the normal situation at the time we conducted our research, where domestic violence cases were directed to a single specialized worker. DPSS has taken steps to ensure that domestic violence workers (and workers handling referrals for mental health and substance abuse services as well) are available at all times, first by training more staff members, and second by designating “backup” workers for each supportive service.

New and Planned Improvements

Over time, DPSS has trained increasing numbers of eligibility and GAIN staff to deal with special services issues. All specialized Eligibility and GAIN workers have been given forty hours of focused domestic violence training. Mount San Antonio College is currently training all public contact staff at all the CalWORKs District Offices. This training will conclude in December 1999. Eligibility and GAIN staff have received two full days of training on substance abuse and mental health from the Department of Health Services. All of this additional training has helped DPSS ensure that workers handling domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse referrals are available at all times

DPSS has also made plans to deal with some of the problems workers identified in the screening and referral process. One of those plans included incorporating the supportive services screening instrument into the CalWORKs intake interview—this became standard practice in April 1999.

VI. EVOLVING AS AN ORGANIZATION

New federal and state laws and regulations governing cash assistance to needy families—henceforth, “the law”—create a number of new responsibilities for welfare agencies without specifying how to meet them. Agencies like DPSS must change, but exactly how to change is something left up to state and local authorities.

It is useful to think of the needed changes as coming in two stages: (1) in the first stage, the changes made are those necessary to meet the initial letter of the law, and (2) in the second stage, the changes made are those needed to meet the medium and long term goals of the law. In the first stage, agencies put in place mandated services, like child care and mental health supportive services; and they create required mechanisms, like verifying school enrollment and ensuring that applicants are not “fleeing felons.” After the first set of changes, all required services and mechanisms *exist*, but they do not necessarily *work*.

The second stage is where tinkering, refinements, and, inevitably, rethinking and redesigning take place. With the help of internal tracking, external evaluation, and knowledge of lessons learned by other agencies, each agency can make the additional changes necessary to bring it closer to its goals. A prominent poverty researcher observed “that passing a law is 10 percent of the challenge to realizing meaningful change, implementing it is the other 90 percent” and “we must all recognize that true welfare reform is a marathon and not a sprint. It is a process and not an event.”⁴⁹

But what kinds of changes are required? In adapting to welfare reform, DPSS has been making changes in three distinct areas: it has been rearranging internal structures, it has been transforming its organizational culture, and it has been negotiating

external linkages. Each of these are interdependent; for example, changes in internal structures demand cultural changes, and new external linkages require new internal structures. Each of the three are discussed below.

Internal Structures

Let us say you want to build a house. First, you lay the foundation and erect the frame. Next, you add requirements like walls and interior plumbing, and amenities like cabinets and fixtures. The closer you get to completion, the more difficult basic changes become. You decide that the walls are the wrong color, you need a better dishwasher, and you want to add a second floor. Repainting the walls is easy. Replacing the dishwasher is easy. Adding a second floor, however, requires that the foundation be strong enough, and that the frame be reinforced before you even get to the actual addition.

In some ways, the implementation of welfare reform is like adding another floor to a house. The welfare-to-work program is the second floor. The eligibility establishment and income maintenance functions of the welfare office, functions that have been in place for decades, are the foundation, frame, and walls. They have not shrunk or disappeared under welfare reform; instead, they have been added to. Although welfare reform *eliminates* the entitlement to public assistance, it does so by *adding* time limits, paternity establishment requirements, immunization certifications, etc.

The Los Angeles GAIN welfare-to-work program is not new. It began operations on November 1, 1988, and since has become one of the largest welfare-to-work programs in the country.⁵⁰ Up until recently, however, GAIN had very little integration with the part of DPSS that handled eligibility determination and income maintenance. Intentionally, GAIN was born and grew up separately, in its own offices, with its own culture.

With the mandate to implement CalWORKs, California counties were faced with an important decision: should they combine eligibility determination functions and welfare-to-work counseling functions in a single worker, or should they keep the two functions separate. As researchers evaluating the implementation of CalWORKs statewide found:

Many high level County staff with whom we spoke told us that, in their view, most EWs simply were not equipped for these tasks. Most EWs had been hired to do the sort of work that defined the EW position—rules-based, straightforward decision-making that tilted toward exclusion unless there was clear evidence otherwise. Many [administrators] feared that people drawn to “clerk” positions could not remake themselves into “junior social workers” with any amount of training; others worried about whether and how much training could be provided to help them do this. Still others were concerned about the inherent inconsistencies in a job that placed social-worker functions on top of eligibility ones.⁵¹

Aside from questions of retraining, the choice also had implications for organizational structure. Combining the eligibility and welfare-to-work functions at the level of line staff implied integration all the way up the administrative hierarchy. Keeping the functions separate allowed for a lower level of administrative integration. To return to the house metaphor, combining functions was like gutting a one-story house and totally rebuilding it. Keeping them separate was like adding a second story to an existing house; it still required structural integration, but without the same degree of completeness.

While some counties chose the former route, Los Angeles chose the latter. This meant that the tasks facing DPSS included building a new interface between income maintenance and welfare-to-work staff, recruiting large numbers of the latter, and retraining the former. For income maintenance staff especially, it meant a number of

procedural changes, and it meant that the actions of welfare-to-work would soon affect their own work much more than had been the case previously. Coordination, communication, and training all became more important.

Culture Change

In an article called “Changing the Culture of Welfare,” a prominent poverty researcher characterized the then-prevailing “culture of welfare” in the following way:

When potential applicants walk into a welfare office, they typically confront a hostile “culture.” Staff are neither trained nor rewarded for helping welfare applicants or recipients achieve economic self-sufficiency and personal independence. Rarely, if ever, does anyone ask clients what they need or how the system can help. The interaction between worker and client is routine and adversarial. Information is processed and institutional antennae are tilted towards screening out the unworthy and detecting fraud and abuse. It is difficult to integrate the roles of cop, or protector of the public purse, and people-changer, even in a “tough love” program.⁵²

Regardless of how accurately this describes the state of DPSS offices prior to welfare reform, it does capture the central dynamic of the old welfare office—the applicant fills out forms, the worker determines eligibility, and there is little or no discussion of alternatives to long-term receipt of benefits. Prior to welfare reform, even during the development of welfare-to-work pilot projects, this was not regarded as a problem. For example, a recent summary by MDRC of the pre-reform lessons of GAIN in Los Angeles stated that “Changes in the message presented at income maintenance (the welfare office) may strengthen—but are not a precondition for—a *work first* program.”⁵³

Even so, the report cited above emphasized that (a) “Program administrators must ensure that staff understand and support the new quick employment goal of the

program” and (b) “Participants need to clearly and repeatedly hear the *work first* message before they can understand and react positively to it”⁵⁴ Giving a clear and consistent message to participants has been noted as one of the most important parts of welfare culture change.⁵⁵

Changing the culture of the welfare office, however, assumes an understanding throughout the hierarchy that the mission of the organization has changed. An expected cause of difficulties in communicating the shift in mission throughout the organization is the fact that, as noted above, most of the old organizational requirements remain. That is, the mandate for accurate eligibility determination has not changed; all of the pre-existing non-CalWORKs programs persist; and many of the parents of aided children will not need to participate in welfare-to-work.

External Linkages

Embracing a new mission is one kind of culture change. Another kind is embodied in a shift from developing all services in-house towards providing access to services through external linkages. While organizations like DPSS may have dallied with contracting-out in the past, new federal and state laws make inter-agency cooperation virtually mandatory. For example, at the federal level, job training and workforce development funds have been funneled through the Department of Labor and its traditional channels, reaching the Private Industry Councils (PICs) and other organizations at the local level. At the state level, AB1542 created a three-stage child care system that requires cooperation at the local level between the welfare agency and at least one child care-coordinating agency.

Under Construction

We find in this evaluation that DPSS has made progress in all three areas—internal structures, culture change, and external linkages. New applicants are now routinely referred directly from eligibility staff to GAIN staff; joint trainings have reinforced a unified message from both income maintenance and welfare-to-work; and DPSS has forged a number of important external relationships in the areas of child care, job training, and the provision of other supportive services. DPSS has largely completed the first stage of welfare reform changes referred to above, and is progressing into the second.

In the remainder of this section, we present and discuss our findings about the organizational aspects of CalWORKs implementation in Los Angeles. Our surveys and focus groups did not break down the topics of concern in quite the same way as we do above. Our research focused close to the interface between DPSS and the people it serves—we conducted survey interviews and focus groups with Eligibility Workers, their supervisors, GAIN Services Workers, and their supervisors. We also interviewed CalWORKs District Office Deputy Directors, but we did not formally interview any higher-level administrators.

In late 1998, the primary concerns articulated by staff related to changes in the internal organization of DPSS. These included: (a) the timing and adequacy of procedural changes, (b) the timing and adequacy of training, (c) the degree of coordination and communication between income maintenance and welfare-to-work staff, (d) the adequacy of existing information systems, and (e) the size of workloads. Although staff members also told us about culture changes and external linkages, these surfaced primarily in the context of the five areas listed above.

DPSS Staff and Implementation Issues

Staff Impressions of Implementation

We asked staff members how effective DPSS management had been so far in implementing CalWORKs. The majority of both Eligibility Workers (55%) and GAIN Services Workers (63%) thought that implementation had been largely effective. Those who disagreed cited a number of distinct problems. One-fifth of Eligibility Workers felt that the timing of management directives was a serious problem. Some remarked that management was handing down changes too rapidly to be assimilated. Others complained that directives—and training—were delivered too close to start dates for the changes to be effectively implemented. Insufficient training was the next most common (11%) problem mentioned among Eligibility Workers. When asked what they would change about the current implementation, EWs gave similar answers. One-fourth of the EWs (25%) asked for additional information and training. Changing the timing of directives was mentioned next most often (24%).

The concerns of GAIN Services Workers were more diverse. One-fifth (20%) cited problems with unclear or inappropriate guidelines and regulations. A small number of others (4 persons, or 6%) remarked that administrators in their offices were effectively implementing the program despite the aforementioned difficulties.⁵⁶ When asked about the changes they would make, responses were even more diverse. While EWs mainly expressed concerns about their ability to do their jobs, GSWs often suggested programmatic changes to make CalWORKs more effective for the participant. Some examples are:

GSW: Participants who are pregnant are still required to do Orientation. I would change that.

GSW: I would not necessarily close cases once they are sanctioned. I would like to see the participant [return to] the same GAIN worker.”

GSW: Child care: decentralize it. Have a location in every location in every community for them to take their kids.

Several GSWs suggested that their workloads be decreased—whether by lessening some of their responsibilities or hiring more workers—so that they could better serve individual participants. Like EWs, however, GSWs said that they needed additional training.

The Deputy Directors we interviewed told us that rapid changes in policy and gaps in training have led to errors and confusion. Their position in the DPSS hierarchy, between line staff and higher level management, provided them with a unique perspective on large-scale policy and organizational change. When Deputy Directors were asked about their opinions regarding the effectiveness of CalWORKs implementation, some were critical:

Deputy Director: So many changes at one time, overwhelming for staff—I had to ensure that everyone understood the changes. Had to ensure training so that everyone was on the same page and doing the job correctly. You have to keep people current and maintain common understanding...Offer more training. I would go with one change at a time. Let us master one thing at a time to give staff time and room to digest, learn changes. Now, it is too overwhelming.

Deputy Director: Very little training for new staff—they haven’t been trained—both new and old staff. New only received general Orientation. Some of the supervisors aren’t training as they should—they don’t have time. Staff is depleted and without training.

In sum, the majority of staff members we talked with were satisfied that DPSS management had been effectively implementing CalWORKs. That did not keep them

from having a number of concerns about implementation. We detail these concerns below.

Procedural Changes

It is official DPSS practice to solicit input from line staff to ensure that the instructions they are given are clear and understandable. Some EWs, however, indicated that *wording* was not the most important consideration. One EW told us that “Some directives are written by non-front line staff who aren’t aware of certain issues.” The EWs felt that their knowledge of street-level reality was not being taken into account. As another EW suggested, effective implementation of reforms demands “Making sure that when reforms come about that on-line staff should be consulted; it can’t only be those at the top.”

Some GAIN workers also suggested greater worker involvement:

GSW: I would try to get workers more involved in the new rules and regulations we should have input in what changes need to be made and our input should be taken seriously.

GSW: I am not sure how we can affect the implementation when the guidelines are out of our control. We just follow their guidelines.

GSS: Involve workers in planning implementation and changes.

Deputy Directors also felt that workers should be given a larger role in welfare reform implementation. On the topic of implementation, one Deputy Director who said, “I don’t even know how to go about it,” insisted that “staff has to be a part of implementation.”

Another Deputy Director complained about the socio-technical consequences of the computer system lagging behind programmatic changes. An example was the

child care provision system. That Deputy Director told us about the results when new child care regulations became effective before the necessary computer changes were made.

So you had all these people calling— I have a child care provider, she’s been calling the welfare office, she’s been calling all over the County regarding her back child care. We’ve been trying to get it straightened out, but because certain things were not in the computer, you know, what can— our hands are tied as workers, as supervisors our hands are truly tied. But it always comes back to us, you know and that’s one of the things. It always comes back to us cuz it’s like, “Well, what are you guys doing?” Well, we can’t do anything until you guys put this in the computer. Until it’s in place. And that’s one of the problems that we face.

One of our Advisory Committee members observed that the time constraints imposed by welfare reform meant that DPSS was “building the airplane while flying.” In this context, it is not surprising we heard other reports about staff being asked to use processes that—like the child care process mentioned above—were not fully in place.

Staff Training

Prior to AB1542’s implementation, only a relatively small subset of the AFDC population had been referred to GAIN.⁵⁷ This meant a relatively small GAIN staff and limited contacts between GAIN and the rest of the organization. With the advent of CalWORKs, GAIN participation in Los Angeles County started increasing rapidly. Inevitably, there were growing pains. GAIN initially suffered from a lack of staff, and as it added workers, it began to run out of office space. As experienced CalWORKs staff were promoted into positions in GAIN, increasing proportions of CalWORKs staff were new hires. Along with a shift of departmental resources towards GAIN, this

meant that many Eligibility Workers were under-trained and poorly informed. Likewise, the rapid influx of workers into GAIN meant strains on the department's ability to provide adequate training for them.

Turnover and Training Gaps

We state above that the number of GAIN Services Workers increased during 1998. In Table 16 we show changes in the number of budgeted positions for GSWs and EWs between March and December of 1998. Over that period, there was a 30% increase in the budgeted number of GSWs, but no change in the number of budgeted CalWORKs EW positions.

Table 16. Budgeted CalWORKs/GAIN Staff Positions and Per Capita Caseload

	March 1998	December 1998	Change
CalWORKs Eligibility Workers	1,881	1,881	0%
CalWORKs Eligibility Supervisors	219	219	0%
CalWORKs cases	254,000	237,000	
Cases/Worker	135	126	-7%
Workers/Supervisor	9	9	0%
GAIN Services Workers	492	642	30%
GAIN Services Supervisors	82	107	30%
GAIN Participants	41,000	98,000	
Participants/Worker	83	152	82%
Workers/Supervisor	6	6	0%

Sources: Special tabulation, County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Social Services, Research and Statistics, 1998; DPSS Research and Statistics, GAIN Activity Reports, March and December 1998.

Notes: Per capita caseloads calculated by URD. Number of active staff may differ from number of funded positions due to temporary absences, unfilled vacancies, etc. Cases and participants shown are total CalWORKs cases (FG and U) for March and December 1998, and total registered GAIN participants for March and December 1998. Number of CalWORKs cases and GAIN participants rounded to nearest 1,000.

With both brainpower and manpower increasingly concentrated on welfare-to-work, the quality of service at the CalWORKs District Offices may have suffered. Of the DPSS staff we interviewed, CalWORKs District Office Deputy Directors were in the best position to gauge the impact of worker turnover, and they did see it as significant. One Deputy Director who was concerned about the “loss of staff to GAIN” told us, “I believe in promotion, but it is difficult to implement new programs with new

staff. New people are here with no training. Some have been here for nine months without training.” One solution suggested by this Deputy Director was that the “sequencing of hiring new staff should be slower.” That is, turnover and replacement of eligibility staff should be paced to ensure adequate service in the CalWORKs offices and to make sure that new workers have the opportunity to learn from more experienced workers. If workers were performing the tasks that normally went with their job descriptions, they picked up knowledge on the job. The gaps in their knowledge, however, might have led to problems for CalWORKs recipients.

Most workers had, however, received some training. In our survey interviews with Eligibility Workers, 79% of the EWs reported having received formal training about their new roles under CalWORKs. Of those who received formal training, only half felt that this training was sufficient in itself (see Table 17). Over one-fourth (27%) of the trained Eligibility Workers felt that they were not adequately prepared to deal with all the program changes. Just under one-fifth (18%) found that with additional on-the-job training they were able to master their new roles. As an EW with several years of experience remarked, “Training didn’t cover the entire program. I had to learn as I did it.” The timing of the training was also a cause of problems. “The training helped, but it happened after the changes went into effect, not before,” said one EW. The EW added that “[There] needs to be better communication between administration and workers.” Despite difficulties with the training process, another EW added that the transition to CalWORKs became “less of a hassle as I learn[ed] more on the job.”

Table 17. Sufficiency of Formal Training on Welfare Reform Changes, Eligibility Workers, 1998

	Percent	# of Responses
Formal training was sufficient	50%	22
Were not prepared to deal with welfare reform program changes	27%	12
On the job training has prepared me for welfare changes	18%	8
Other	5%	2
Total	100%	44

Source: URD Eligibility Worker Survey, 1998

Note: Includes only respondents who said they received formal training about program changes due to welfare reform.

Among those workers who had not received formal training, feelings were mixed. One worker felt that on-the-job training was sufficient.

I like it without the training. At least what I've heard from other workers, training is by the book, not what you do here. On the job I am learning how to do this. There are lots of changes.

A more-experienced colleague disagreed.

Receiving no training affected me a great deal. I wasn't prepared for changes. Clients were informed before we were. Not all proper materials were given to us on time. We fumbled our way through.

More EWs appeared to agree with the latter than the former. When Eligibility Workers were asked about how they would improve the implementation of welfare reform, some suggested a need for more training (20%) and a clarification of regulations (6%):

EW: More training. Before implementation—and not just the day before implementation.

EW: Cases are coming in constantly, we need to be more organized. We have questions and we're running around the building trying to find answers.

EW: We should be informed and trained at least 30 days before the participant learns of changes, [or 30 days before] they go into effect.

EW: They should test us to make sure we know what we're doing, some people have been here a long time and don't know the regulations.

The specificity of workers' complaints regarding incomplete and insufficient training reflects Eligibility staff's particular relationship to recipients. EWs are the first workers to come into contact with potential CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants. How workers serve these clients and how well they inform them about program rules and the availability of supportive services affects the ability of DPSS to accomplish its new imperative to move participants from welfare-to-work.

DPSS does have plans to improve the quality and quantity of staff training. A "Training Academy" to properly orient and inform new staff members is in the works, and we rate this as a promising practice. In its proposed budget for the fiscal year 1999-2000, the department proposes to station a staff development specialist in each CalWORKs District Office. This staff member will provide on-site training for new workers and refresher courses for current staff, a much-needed function.

Gaps in GAIN Training

Some GAIN Services Workers were also critical of the formal training they received, both initially and on an ongoing basis. In late 1998, new GSWs went through two training segments—a brief Orientation to GAIN and an additional set of sessions training them to use GEARS, the GAIN computer system. Supervisors told us that, at the time, GAIN was trying to find the right mix of formal (classroom) and on-the-job training. When asked about how they would change implementation, several GSWs (16%) suggested more training:

GSW: We need more training for workers. More updated information on whatever is new.

GSW: GAIN induction is a joke. Conducted by U.C. Davis; What I thought I was there to learn, which was about GAIN, didn't happen. GEARS training was a little better, but not much. There is room for more.

GSW: Would like to have more training for GSW. Should track employee's training experience so they can send us to correct sessions.

GAIN supervisors also voiced criticism of what they saw as inadequate training. In the GSS focus group, respondents identified inconsistency as a problem. Speaking of a special training on supportive services, a GSS observed:

Well you know what the problem with that training is that each group had a different trainer. So each group came back with something different. You know, if you're gonna train on some things, we all need the same trainer so we're all focused, you know. Because one trainer do things one way and provide certain amount of information and another one would do it different. I think that's why training wasn't beneficial.

Some of the supervisors also resented training that they felt was too elementary for them. One, who labeled a supportive services training “a waste of time,” explained,

Most of us are college graduates. Most of us supervisors, we have degrees in human services, psychology, sociology. Most of the supervisors and the workers. So we know how to identify someone who comes in that has experienced this problem. So we don't need to go to a training that tells us that. We need to go to a training that says, "These are your providers, this is what you do."

Another problem they identified was a gap between the content of training sessions and the actual substance of the work. The same supervisor quoted above reported on a training program that was conducted, under contract, by the University of California, Davis. Speaking of the new GSWs who were sent for training, she told us:

They got back from training and we, as regional supervisors, had to retrain them again. Because they did not, U.C. Davis did not give them what they needed to know to basically function as a worker.

An issue that came up several times in our surveys and focus groups with GSWs and their supervisors was that the GAIN Services Worker was asked to play several different roles that, in the opinion of the workers, they were neither trained nor given proper recognition for. As a GSW in one of our focus groups remarked,

We're not social workers, but we're acting as counselors and social workers. Not, uh, financial managers, but we're acting as financial advisors.

In the view of a more resentful GSW, not only is there a contradiction between actual GSW duties and the official recognition given to the GSW, but it is a contradiction that benefits DPSS management.

OK, then when [it is] time for us to renew [the] contract as GSWs, as GAIN case managers or whatever we are called—employment counselors—we don't know if we're social workers or if we're employment counselors. And when it comes to them giving us a job rating, they look on us and tell us, "No, you're not social workers, and anyone can do the job."

When reviewing these comments from DPSS staff, it is important to recall that these came at an early stage in CalWORKs implementation. On one hand, DPSS staff have since had more time to adapt to new procedures, and on the other hand, the department has introduced a number of new training programs. In subsequent evaluations, we will continue to monitor the adequacy of staff training.

Coordination and Communication

To CalWORKs Eligibility Workers, a "case" for which they are responsible is a whole family unit. A "case" to the GAIN Services Worker is an individual who belongs to one of those family units. When we interviewed EWs and GSWs late last year, we found that, despite being responsible for assisting the same people, they rarely communicated with each other.

Many EWs and GSWs told us that the level of communication between Eligibility and GAIN staff was not satisfactory. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the EWs, and just under half (44%) of the GSWs we interviewed told us that there was poor communication between the two groups of workers (see Table 18). Just one-third of each group thought, conversely, that communication between them was "good" or "open." Not all workers thought that lack of communication was necessarily a bad thing, but many, especially among the EWs, apparently did.

Table 18. Communication Between GAIN and Eligibility Staff by Worker Type, 1998

	GAIN Services		Eligibility	
	Workers		Workers	
	Percent	# of Responses	Percent	# of Responses
Poor communication	44%	31	64%	35
Good (open) communication	31%	22	33%	18
Other	25%	17	3%	2
Total	100%	70	100%	55

Source: URD GAIN Services Worker and CalWORKs Eligibility Worker Surveys, 1998

One GSW suggested that one improvement in how welfare reform was implemented should be “Better communication between GAIN and Eligibility Workers.” Likewise, a GAIN supervisor stated: “Now that all programs are under CalWORKs, there needs to be better interaction between GAIN and Eligibility.”

DPSS has taken steps to improve interaction between GAIN and Eligibility staff. In December 1998 and January 1999, DPSS conducted Joint Staff Trainings to ensure that all public contact staff were properly informed about welfare reform and their respective roles in making CalWORKs work. These sessions involved all Eligibility and GAIN staff, and all public contact clerical staff. Each staff member was scheduled to attend two half-day sessions. The first session covered the major features of CalWORKs, and the second covered the services offered by CalWORKs to remove barriers to employment. In addition to informing employees about welfare reform, the joint sessions provided forums for staff to express how CalWORKs has affected their jobs, working environments, and relationships.

Distinctions between Eligibility Workers and GAIN Services Workers Lead to Inefficiency and Conflict

Relative to CalWORKs Eligibility Workers, GAIN Services Workers are better-educated (see Table 19), more generously rewarded, and are housed in more comfortable conditions. When GAIN units were installed in CalWORKs District Offices, starting April 1, 1998, they effectively became “islands” of carpet and quiet, reinforcing the distinction between GAIN and other parts of DPSS. The differences in treatment between GAIN workers and CalWORKs workers have led to a great deal of resentment.

In our interviews with Deputy District Directors, all noted the initial difficulty in transitioning the GAIN program into CalWORKs. More specifically, creating a strong working relationship between staff proved to be a difficult task with GAIN needs clearly being placed above the needs of CalWORKs as a whole:

Deputy Director: ... when GSWs first arrived, and preferential treatment was evident, there was friction. We had to make clear the goals of the department. We need to motivate eligibility [workers]. In this office [communication] is guarded. I mean it is getting better, [but] there was that resentment.

Deputy Director: Had to mend rifts between staff. Initially it was very bad GAIN has been prioritized, *carte blanche* attitude—this caused a rift. As a deputy, I fight for the rights of eligibility staff. Morale was terrible. It is improving.

One of the ways that Deputy Directors smoothed over relations was by telling EWs that they would be able to become GSWs themselves. As one Deputy Director told us, “We gave eligibility staff a boost by letting them know that they could get the promotion.”

Table 19. Characteristics of CalWORKs and GAIN Workers and Supervisors, 1998

	Eligibility Workers	GAIN Services Workers	Eligibility Supervisors	GAIN Services Supervisors
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
African American	25%	29%	50%	33%
Latino	54%	39%	50%	44%
White	11%	9%	0%	11%
Asian	9%	20%	0%	11%
Other Racial/Ethnic Group	2%	4%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Education</i>				
Less than High School	0%	0%	0%	0%
High School Diploma / GED	27%	0%	13%	0%
High School and Some College	39%	10%	75%	0%
Community College Degree	20%	20%	0%	11%
Vocational Degree	2%	1%	0%	0%
Bachelors Degree or Higher	13%	66%	13%	67%
Masters Degree or Higher	0%	3%	0%	22%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
Sample Size	56	70	8	9

Source: URD CalWORKs Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

The majority of Eligibility Workers would have to be reassured in other ways, however. It appears that most Eligibility Workers do not meet the GSW education requirements, and so are ineligible for promotion. Based on our surveys, two-thirds of

EWs had not completed at least a two-year college degree—27% had only a high school diploma and another 39% had finished some college in addition to their high school diploma—and could not be promoted to GSW (see Table 19). One Deputy Director who reported that “Once they [EWs] saw the [GAIN] furniture it was a problem” said that the EWs were satisfied when “I also told them that the next phase of CalWORKs will show changes for Eligibility [Workers].”

Job Satisfaction, Likes and Dislikes

Managers generally see poor morale among their workers as a barrier to efficiency and productivity. Although we did not ask for ratings of job satisfaction, our interviews with staff and our observations of workers in everyday situations led us to conclude that low morale was a significant problem among Eligibility Workers. Having just begun our evaluation, we cannot estimate to what extent low job satisfaction among EWs was a symptom of the transition to CalWORKs as opposed to a long-term characteristic of the position.

It was clear, however, that EWs and GSWs used each other as points of comparison, and that both EWs and GSWs thought that they saw the EW position as the “loser” in the comparison. The three main areas of concern which staff brought to our attention were (a) quality of working environment, (b) quantity of work, and (c) level of pay.⁵⁸ Although GSWs disputed the idea that they had less work to do, GSWs and EWs otherwise agreed about the two positions. For example, a GSW who said EWs “hate us”, went on to explain:

They say we don’t do anything, we have better offices, better desks. Their attitude changes when they come work for GAIN, because they are now here. They feel left out

because money has been invested in GAIN and they are stuck in horrible working conditions.

Conversely, an EW who admitted “I haven’t had an opportunity to interact” with GAIN workers, told us that “I feel their attitude is superior when it shouldn’t be, because they make more money, have more space, and we do more work than they do.”

Table 20. Job Likes and Dislikes, CalWORKs Eligibility Workers and GAIN Services Workers, 1998

	Eligibility Workers	GAIN Services Workers
<i>What do you like about your job?</i> ¹		
Helping people	56%	93%
Other	44%	7%
Total	100%	100%
# of Responses	56	70
<i>What do you dislike about your job?</i> ¹		
Nothing	11%	14%
Bureaucracy	21%	26%
Caseload too large	27%	3%
Client behavior	11%	3%
Paperwork	14%	0%
Low participation rate	0%	21%
Lack of time for each participant	0%	13%
Other	16%	20%
Total	100%	100%
# of Responses	54	70

Source: URD CalWORKs Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

¹ Responses to this open-ended question were coded by URD.

Morale in organizations depends in part on how fairly workers feel treated, and the perception of fairness hinges in part on whether workers feel they are being treated favorably or unfavorably relative to other groups workers. The intrinsic rewards of the position itself, however, are also important. We therefore asked workers what they liked and disliked most about their positions. Table 20 shows that both Eligibility and

GAIN workers enjoyed helping people. It is also apparent that “helping people” was a more important aspect of the job to GSWs than it was to EWs.⁵⁹ Almost all GSWs (93%) cited “helping people” as what they liked most about their jobs. Although 56% of EWs gave the same response, the rest gave a wide variety of answers, including “nothing.”

Turning to dislikes, we found that both EWs and GSWs disliked the bureaucratic aspects of their jobs in roughly equal numbers (21% and 26%, respectively). GAIN workers identified low participation rates (21%) and lack of time with participants (13%) as aspects of their jobs they dislike. This is consistent with our observation that GSWs strongly believe that their program can help participants and their reported desire to help people. For dislikes, Eligibility Workers were more likely to point to things that did not relate to individual recipients, such as excessive caseload (27%) and too much paperwork (14%).⁶⁰

The contrasting likes and dislikes of EWs and GSWs corresponded to differences in how they, both formally and informally, perceived their jobs. GAIN workers clearly felt that their job was to serve participants by helping them to become employable and reach self-sufficiency. In contrast, Eligibility Workers tended to characterize their jobs as a matter of “pushing paper.” Their jobs, they felt, allowed few opportunities to connect with the recipient on a human level. Their time with the recipient was consumed mainly with the unrewarding task of filling out forms.

Poor Understanding of GAIN and New Law

GAIN workers told us that Eligibility Workers were often unclear about areas of the GAIN program. GSWs told us that when EWs explained GAIN to CalWORKs recipients, they often made mistakes that led to erroneous preconceptions about the program. GAIN workers felt that the lack of communication described above was one

of the causes of this problem. Better communication with Eligibility Workers regarding the content and requirements of GAIN was a major concern for GAIN Services Workers. As one GAIN Services Worker commented in our survey interviews:

Eligibility Workers still don't know what the GAIN program is and this is causing confusion and resistance among participants. They explain the program in a way that makes them hostile to GAIN.

When GAIN workers were asked how they would improve the current implementation of CalWORKs, some talked about the relationship between GAIN and eligibility staff:

GSW #1: The participant should be given more information about GAIN once they have seen the [eligibility] screener. They should be told how GAIN affects Eligibility so they [EWs] know what to expect.

GSW #2: Train GSWs and EWs regarding their roles in the program.

All surveyed GAIN workers stated that they had worked with eligibility staff on at least one occasion. In contrast, only 54% of the Eligibility Workers had worked with GAIN staff. In most instances, the reason for contact between GAIN and Eligibility staff had to do with verification of client information. More than three-quarters (83%) of GAIN workers reported this as the main reason they had had contact with Eligibility workers; almost as many EWs (73%) reported the same. Table 21 illustrates how the relationship—or the lack of one—between GAIN and Eligibility staff affected the ability of workers to do their jobs. A large proportion (43%) of GSWs reported that contact with EWs was generally positive, mainly because it helped them obtain information on participants. Other EWs (17%) felt that a lack of contact between GSWs and EWs resulted in EWs making errors. A similar proportion of EWs (20%), including both

those who had and who had not had contact with GSWs, felt that a lack of communication with GSWs meant that EWs did not fully understand GAIN. On the other hand, large proportions of EWs did not see communication with GAIN workers as important; of the EWs who had not had contact with GSWs, 60% said that the lack of contact had no effect on their jobs.

Table 21. Perceived Effect of Working with Different Staff by Worker Type, 1998

A. GAIN Services Workers: Effect of Working with CalWORKs Eligibility Workers

	Percent
Generally positive	43%
Able to address Eligibility Worker errors	17%
No effect	40%
Total	100%
Sample Size	70

B. Eligibility Workers: Effect of Not Working with GAIN Services Workers

	Percent
Leads to EW misunderstanding of GAIN	20%
No effect	60%
Other	20%
Total	100%
Sample Size	25

C. Eligibility Workers: Effect of Working with GAIN Services Workers

	Percent
Generally positive	27%
Helps address misunderstandings of GAIN	20%
No effect	37%
Other	17%
Total	100%
Sample Size	30

Source: URD CalWORKs Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding error.

One District Office on our survey attempted to bridge the communication gap between GAIN and Eligibility staff with its own initiative, separate from the department-wide effort. The Cudahy CalWORKs District Office conducted in-house training regarding CalWORKs and the GAIN program. Their own GAIN supervisor and Eligibility supervisors conducted the training session.

Information Systems

Welfare reform places unprecedented demands on welfare agency information systems.⁶¹ It requires tracking of more information—time limits, assignment to welfare-to-work components, and the approval of supportive services, for example—at a high level of detail. It also requires a higher level of integration between information systems within an agency and greater sharing of information with systems outside the agency than had previously been the case.

Internally, DPSS uses a number of data systems, including the following:

- CDMS (Caseload Data Management System)—Tracks case and benefit information on General Relief and Medi-Cal-only cases
- IBPS (Integrated Benefits Payment System)—Tracks case and benefit information on CalWORKs and Food Stamps-only cases
- GEARS (GAIN Employment and Activity Reporting System)—Includes information on GAIN participants and on non-participants who receive supportive services
- WCMIS (Welfare Case Management Information System)—Used by DPSS and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to track basic case information, like names, addresses, and phone numbers

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- LEADER (Los Angeles Eligibility, Automated Determination, Evaluation and Reporting)—New system replacing CDMS, IBPS, and WCMIS; entered a pilot phase in one office on May 3, 1999

Each GSW routinely uses GEARS to manage information about his or her assigned participants. Typically, EWs do not have direct access to computers—a problem DPSS has been actively trying to solve. Instead, data entry clerks are responsible for recording in computer systems information about the actions of EWs with regard to CalWORKs cases. EWs do receive computer-generated paperwork related to their cases, and they make decisions that are ultimately reflected in DPSS information systems. Some data are automatically shared between GEARS and other DPSS systems. When a data entry clerk updates a case, that information, if appropriate, will be forwarded to GEARS. Some actions taken in GEARS cause actions to be taken by other data systems. There is, however, no information system that is truly shared by GAIN Services Workers and Eligibility Workers.

With few exceptions, GAIN participants are members of CalWORKs cases,⁶² and data on their cases are usually inaccessible to GAIN staff. Some GSWs in our focus groups felt strongly that they should be better linked with EWs by computer, if only so that they would know more quickly about changes in their participants' cases.

GSW: What I would suggest is that, well, hopefully in the future, we're gonna have a more integrated system where the welfare office and GAIN are on the same page as far as our computers and everything, so we can see all the background information and correct it. Sometimes things come up, things like they been off aid for six months, or a case comes up 'deceased', or something.

Several others echoed the sentiment that DPSS had a need to “link GAIN and EW computer systems [and] share all data.”

When GSWs and other DPSS staff have operated on the same computer data, however, the results have not always been ideal. As noted above, changes made by CalWORKs District Office staff are sometimes reflected in GEARS. These changes often affect what GSWs are able to do, but the system does not allow the workers to undo changes they think are incorrect. As one GSW reported:

We also have a problem with the Eligibility Workers, they have the ability to post certain codes on the computer that says the person is to be exempted because they’re ill or pregnant or working. So when they post it, we’re like “OK, who put this code on there? We never put it on there.” So how’s this person getting this exemption? Then we have to call that person [EW] and find out, “OK, what information did you get? How do you know this person is in this state?”

The GSW went on to note the effect that being unable to undo changes in DPSS information systems could have on other cases:

And when that code shows on the computer, if they were in the process of being sanctioned, we can’t sanction them because that’s showing. So you’re back in, you’re in a Catch-22. What am I supposed to do with this case? I can’t hold on to it because I have 300 more cases that keep coming through. I have to, the thing is, move ’em out, move ’em out, we gotta move ’em out.

A GSW supervisor noted a similar problem within GEARS that hindered the processing of cases:

One problem that we have that I really don’t like is, is uh, well some of the problems we have with [GEARS], with database changes. Like for example, sometimes we need to

change the appointment type to “OP” [because there are] both parents in the home. We need to register one parent, but because the appointment type is not OP, [we can’t.] I wish um, [they] would give us access to do those changes ...

The supervisor was unable to properly enroll one parent of a two-parent family in GAIN because the supervisor was not authorized to make a necessary change in the system. Reflecting the age of the GEARS system, the “appointment type” database field has nothing to do with appointments; instead, it holds a piece of information about the participant’s history or current status. In this instance, the supervisor was unable to change the “appointment type” to indicate that the participant was an “other parent”—the parent who was not the family’s primary earner.

DPSS is improving the access of EWs to computers, and the planned LEADER system should make many tasks easier to accomplish. Indeed, an independent research group recently concluded that, “when taken together, the LEADER and GEARS modification efforts, if successful in implementing planned changes, will result in adequate support” of welfare reform data needs.⁶³ Because LEADER and GEARS will remain separate systems, however, it is unclear how well GAIN and eligibility information will be shared. This means that the computer-related problems reported here may persist for some time. Note that this should not be seen as an evaluation of DPSS’s information systems.

Workloads

While rapid expansion often brought large workloads to GAIN Services Workers, many GAIN Services Workers still reported that their workload was less than that of the Eligibility Worker. In our surveys we asked about how their jobs had changed since the inception of welfare reform. Table 22 shows that both EWs (14%) and GSWs

(50%) identified informing participants of the changes in welfare as a duty that has been added to their workload. However, Eligibility Workers also identified an increase in paperwork (52%), longer intakes (11%) and motivating clients (2%) as significant changes in their jobs. Thus, the Eligibility Workers have indicated an increase in a number of duties, while GAIN workers have only identified a few.

Table 22. Most Significant Change in Job Since Reform by Worker Type, 1998

	GAIN Services Worker	Eligibility Worker
<i>How has the implementation of CalWORKs affected your job duties and responsibilities?¹</i>	0%	52%
More paperwork to fill out	0%	52%
Longer intakes	0%	17%
Informing participants of available services	50%	14%
Motivating clients	0%	2%
Identify need for supportive services	11%	0%
None/Other	39%	15%
Total	100%	100%
# of Responses	36	42

Source: URD CalWORKs Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

¹ Responses to this open-ended question were coded by URD. Coding was done for EW and GSW responses separately.

GAIN staff members reported that processing child care applications had come to occupy as much as half of their time, severely impeding their ability to become familiar with individual participants and to assist those participants in meeting their welfare-to-work goals. Thirteen percent of the GAIN workers in our survey indicated the lack of time they could spend with each individual participant as one aspect of their

job they disliked. When asked how they would change the implementation of GAIN into CalWORKs some of the GAIN workers identified the need for quality time with participants:

GSW: Caseload should be lowered so we can spend more time with participants to help them

GSW: We need more time to work with participants to motivate them

GSW: Need more time for counseling

GSW: I would have someone else handle child care so we can have more time with the participant

GSW: The workload should be decreased. We are always busy, most end up with headaches.

Summary: DPSS Staff and Implementation Issues

In sum, Eligibility and GAIN Services Workers have borne the brunt of large-scale policy and programmatic changes. They are the staff members who work most closely with participants and recipients, and they are, therefore, among the DPSS employees whose jobs changed the most with welfare reform. In our surveys and focus groups, CalWORKs staff identified a number of problem areas that affected their ability to do their jobs effectively. Both GAIN and Eligibility staff were concerned about the level of training they had received from DPSS, which they generally regarded as insufficient. The superior pay, status, and work environment enjoyed by GSWs in comparison to EWs led to tension between the two groups of workers, and this tension led in turn to strained lines of communication. Without regular contact with GSWs, EWs were deprived of an important source of information about GAIN. Communication was further hampered by the absence of a common computer system. Moreover, GAIN

workers reported a number of difficulties with GEARS, their computer system, and many EWs said that they had no computer access at all. Other concerns included GAIN workloads that, some GSWs felt, kept them from devoting adequate time to individual participants.

External Linkages

To facilitate the implementation of CalWORKs, DPSS has been reaching outside of itself in three different ways. First, in formulating its plans for CalWORKs implementation, DPSS made a major effort to elicit and incorporate community input. Second, in providing services new to DPSS, the department has turned to and contracted with other organizations with established expertise—the child care and special services providers described above are examples of this. Third, DPSS has negotiated cooperative relationships with organizations whose interests complement those of DPSS.

Community Input

In keeping with the intent of the Welfare to Work Act of 1997, DPSS reached out broadly into communities throughout the County, seeking collaborators and soliciting input on how it should implement welfare reform. It sponsored twelve community planning forums during October 1997, and subsequently created fourteen ongoing public planning workgroups to maintain the community connections established in these early forums.

Building Cooperation

DPSS has also been creating cooperative ventures with other organizations that have a stake in welfare reform. The joint effort between DPSS, LACOE, and the Los Angeles

Unified School District to provide after-school care, mentioned above, is one example. In another example, DPSS Director Lynn Bayer signed a Memorandum of Understanding in April 1998 to help form a Welfare-to-Work coordinating group. The group, involving Private Industry Councils, the Employment Development Department, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and others has the purpose of promoting cooperation and collaboration, with the ultimate end of making welfare-to-work efforts succeed. This is a unique and *promising* practice.

VII. CONCLUSIONS: PROGRESS AND CONCERNS

This report presents the results of our initial monitoring of the implementation of welfare reform in Los Angeles County. Our data collection, through surveys and focus groups, took place in late 1998. The data we collected were supplemented by administrative data subsequently provided by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) and by discussions with DPSS administrators to clarify departmental policies and plans.

When former California Governor Pete Wilson signed AB1542, the bill that created CalWORKs, he placed a heavy burden on California counties. Counties were given just five months⁶⁴ to submit plans to the state for drastic changes in their cash aid provision programs. They were to have CalWORKs programs substantially in place by January 1, 1998—less than five months after the signing of AB1542. Some counties, including Los Angeles, were allowed to delay implementation of their welfare-to-work programs until April 1, 1998, less than eight months after passage of the law. Given the number of programmatic changes and new responsibilities that county welfare departments were being asked to handle, it is fair to say that CalWORKs implementation proceeded under intense time pressure.

We have pointed out in this evaluation that implementing CalWORKs in Los Angeles means a major change in the mission of DPSS. In the past, the role of DPSS was to accurately determine eligibility for public aid programs and deliver the aid mandated by law. Welfare reform has redefined DPSS as an organization whose most important goal is to help parents to end their reliance on public assistance and instead support their families through employment.

In the wake of welfare reform, the new mission of DPSS was clear, but the path it needed to pursue to meet its new goals was less certain. True, the broad outlines of the new program were defined by law: CalWORKs offers a variety of supportive services to remove barriers to work; it places time limits on aid receipt; it sanctions parents who do not comply with program rules; and so on. Still, many implementation details were left to the counties. This left DPSS and other county welfare departments asking this question: how do we get there from here?

DPSS has taken, in effect, a two-pronged approach to “getting there”: (a) it has made careful implementation plans with extensive outside consultation, and (b) it has been flexible in implementing those plans. First, DPSS created a planning initiative that involved members of the community and other stakeholders. It developed detailed plans for each major aspect of CalWORKs, and presented them to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors for comment and approval. It continues to intelligently structure programmatic plans for services it must provide, involving others in the process. Second, as plans have been implemented, they have been iteratively revised based on their observed effectiveness. Furthermore, DPSS is now planning to implement Management by Results, building the collection of performance measures into the programs themselves as a means of assessing outcomes.

For example, DPSS is now working with other County departments to develop a “Long Term Family Self-Sufficiency Plan” that it intends to submit to the Board of Supervisors in November 1999. A central part of the plan is the identification of a set of indicators that will be used to guide program planning and implementation. DPSS began developing its plan by adopting an expansive definition of long-term family self-sufficiency that included considerations of family health; neighborhood safety; social, emotional, and economic well-being; education; and work force readiness. To identify

measurable indicators of these elements of family self-sufficiency, DPSS spearheaded a research effort, utilizing expertise from other County departments, academics, and community-based organizations. The indicators will be used to choose among program proposals and to judge program performance.

By late 1998, when we made our observations and conducted our surveys and focus groups, most of the detailed plans DPSS needed to submit to the Board of Supervisors had already been reviewed by the Board and approved. The CalWORKs welfare-to-work program had been in place since April, and most of the key CalWORKs program elements were in place (exceptions included Post-Employment Services, which is still in a very early stage of implementation, and Diversion, which remains in the planning stage). GAIN staff were rushing to meet a January 1, 1999, deadline for enrolling all remaining aided persons who were mandatory welfare-to-work participants. Eligibility staff and GAIN staff were beginning to get used to CalWORKs, but program changes were still occurring frequently enough that workers had to regard it as still a work in progress.

As with the body of this report, we have organized our conclusions about CalWORKs implementation in Los Angeles County in 1998 into four major areas: (a) *Informing Recipients and Participants*; (b) *Motivating Welfare-to-Work*; (c) *Removing Barriers to Work*; and (d) *Evolving as an Organization*.

Informing Recipients and Participants

CalWORKs offers incentives to induce welfare recipients to begin working, and it applies penalties to those who do not take advantage of the incentives. One incentive is that no more than half of a recipient's earned income is counted when calculating his or her family's cash grant, allowing the recipient to increase the family's income through employment. On the other hand, if a recipient must, by law, participate in welfare-to-

work activities, his or her cash grant will be cut if the recipient does not. These incentives and penalties can only be effective if aid recipients know about them.

We found in this evaluation that, by and large, CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants had been told by DPSS staff about important features of CalWORKs, including time limits, requirements to document child vaccinations and school attendance, and the availability of supportive services. GAIN participants were, in general, better informed about program details than were CalWORKs recipients who were not involved in GAIN. We did not, however, measure how well participants and recipients *understood* what they were told. Determining how participants interpret or misinterpret what DPSS tells them is an important next step.

Motivating Welfare-to-Work

Our initial research on the GAIN welfare-to-work program did not go far beyond the experiences of participants with the GAIN Orientation and Appraisal. From the perspective of GAIN, this is just the first step in a path that leads into employment and, ideally, all the way to self-sufficiency. Optimally, according to GAIN, participants are introduced to GAIN and given a big motivational boost in the Orientation and Appraisal. They next enter Job Club and pick up pointers on how to look for and how to keep a job. In no more than three weeks of searching, if all goes well, they find jobs. If they do not find a job, they are given an in-depth vocational assessment, and a plan to move them into the employment is drawn up and executed. After settling into employment, participants return to GAIN for Post-Employment Services, where they are given the advice and training they need to progress from their current jobs into better jobs. Eventually, these “better” jobs turn into careers that allow participants to support their families without public assistance—the primary goal of CalWORKs.

It seems likely that the success of this sequence depends on GAIN's ability to help participants understand and accept the program. We did find in our focus groups that GAIN participants felt very positive about GAIN offices and staff, and many enjoyed and felt motivated by the GAIN Orientation. They expressed a strong desire to work and, despite some hesitations about the details of the program, they embraced the goals of GAIN. They were not confident, however, that the jobs they thought they qualified for—mostly dead-end, minimum wage jobs—would help them move ahead. Many believed that, without up-front training, they would not be able to advance. They had come to GAIN with hopes that their welfare-to-work program would be tailored to them personally, starting with an in-depth assessment. They were frustrated that their initial sessions with their GSWs were brief and impersonal. It appears that participants either did not understand the GAIN welfare-to-work sequence and the reasoning behind it, or, otherwise, they did not accept it. This problem might be helped by more detailed discussion in the Orientation and Appraisal about how GAIN plans to help participants move from welfare-reliance to employment-based self-sufficiency.

For their part, GAIN workers also felt that they could serve participants better if they were able to spend more quality time with them, winning their trust, learning about their goals and problems, and counseling them on the transition from welfare to work. Some workers also expressed concerns that GAIN needed to be more flexible, especially for participants whose skill or other deficiencies made failure in an initial job search all but certain. These concerns should have lessened somewhat since 1998. DPSS has since met its January 1, 1999, deadline for enrolling mandatory participants; it has added literacy testing to the Orientation and created a special program for those who fail; and it has requested additional GAIN workers in its fiscal year 1999-2000 budget proposal.

Removing Barriers to Work

Central to the CalWORKs welfare-to-work model is the offering of a range of supportive services designed to remove barriers to work. Supportive services include child care assistance, transportation assistance, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and aid to victims of domestic violence. Providing access to this wide range of services is new to DPSS.

The most important of these services, at least in terms of utilization, is child care assistance. Under CalWORKs, parents who are working or participating in welfare-to-work activities are eligible for assistance in finding and paying for child care services for their young children. In late 1998, the problems being experienced with child care assistance broke down into four categories: (a) client and provider difficulties with application and invoice forms due to complexity or language issues; (b) staff difficulties due to inconsistent procedures and the need to troubleshoot participant problems; (c) development of the relationship between DPSS and the R&R/APP agencies; and (d) legal issues related to in-home license-exempt providers.

In our focus groups, participants and staff alike told us that participants and providers experienced difficulties with the forms they needed to submit to DPSS. Although a multi-lingual child care application should be available soon, in 1998 the application was available in English only. Larger institutional child care providers should be able to master the invoice forms fairly easily, but many license-exempt providers are friends or relatives of CalWORKs recipients, people who may be poorly educated and have a limited command of English. DPSS has addressed the latter problem by making instructions available in multiple languages.

For staff, the difficulties experienced by participants and providers added several time-consuming activities, including the review of application forms and research

on why particular providers were experiencing payment delays. Within GAIN, there were inconsistencies in procedures between and within offices in areas such as the division of labor between the individual GSW, the GSW's supervisor, and one or more specialized child care workers.

As the relationship between the R&R/APP agencies developed, some of these problems reportedly eased. Ongoing negotiations between DPSS and the agencies have taken place. After our field research was completed, the R&R/APPs stationed representatives in each of the CalWORKs District Offices and GAIN Regional Offices, and their presence should have facilitated the delivery of referrals, the processing of forms, and the dissemination of information about child care assistance.

One issue that is likely to remain a concern for some time is the payment of license-exempt providers who perform their services in the home of the participant. Under one interpretation of federal law, these license-exempt providers become employees of the participant and their payment is subject to the minimum wage. The legal issues are complicated and not entirely settled, and they place DPSS, the R&R/APPs, and the participants who use these providers in a difficult position.

The provision of child care ought to remove a significant barrier from the paths of CalWORKs parents who would like to find employment. Many CalWORKs recipients require additional services, however, to be able to participate in the labor market. According to national estimates, on the order of 24% of welfare recipients are current victims of domestic violence, between 4% and 28% suffer from mental health conditions, and from 5% to 27% have substance abuse problems.⁶⁵ Like the absence of child care or the need for transportation, these problems can easily be barriers to work. Unlike needs for child care or transportation assistance, however, determining clients' needs for special services may require overcoming barriers of discomfort,

denial, and lack of trust. GSWs and Intake EWs now administer a carefully-crafted screening instrument to recipients and participants in order to identify substance abuse and mental health problems. They also present new clients with information on domestic violence, and invite the clients to ask for whatever assistance they need.

In our focus groups, however, GSWs argued that the screening questions were counterproductive because they were not being administered in the context of an established, trusting relationship. They felt uncomfortable asking these questions which, they felt, put clients on the defensive. In our surveys, both GSWs and EWs indicated that they did not feel that they had adequate expertise to screen for these problems.

Another significant difficulty that GAIN staff noted was that, when participants were referred for clinical assessment for special services, it was often difficult to get hold of the appropriate clinician to schedule an appointment. Making the participant wait, the GSWs felt, reduced the likelihood that the participant would keep the appointment. For mental health services, this problem has been addressed in two ways. First, the Department of Mental Health (DMH), which handles mental health clinical assessments, added more staff to schedule appointments. Second, in the small number of DPSS offices where space allowed, DMH staff are now located on-site.

Evolving as an Organization

As mentioned above, DPSS has had to make major organizational and procedural changes in order to meet the demands of welfare reform. The changes DPSS has made to implement CalWORKs have been in three distinct areas: it has rearranged internal structures, it has transformed its organizational culture, and it has negotiated new external linkages. These changes are interdependent; for example, changes in internal structures demand cultural changes, and new external linkages require new internal structures.

The external linkages that DPSS has had to forge in order to implement CalWORKs are of particular significance. As part of its planning process, DPSS reached out to communities throughout Los Angeles, soliciting input and feedback. It created a number of planning groups, some of which continue to function. In order to expand the availability of child care, DPSS negotiated a groundbreaking agreement that involved the state of California, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the Los Angeles County Office of Education. Partly to pave the way for Post-Employment Services, DPSS has signed onto a countywide collaborative effort that includes employers, public agencies, and private agencies.

Welfare reform has changed the duties and everyday activities of DPSS line staff. In our surveys and focus groups, EWs and GSWs related to us a number of concerns about CalWORKs implementation. These included: (a) the timing and adequacy of procedural changes, (b) the timing and adequacy of training, (c) the degree of coordination and communication between income maintenance and welfare-to-work staff, (d) the adequacy of existing information systems, and (e) the size of workloads. In this evaluation, we found that line staff were, overall, satisfied that DPSS administrators were implementing CalWORKs effectively. A number of workers, however, reported that procedural changes were being made too frequently, and that the training that should accompany those changes was often not timely. Training was an especially important issue with regard to EWs because of high turnover during 1998, particularly among experienced EWs. Regardless of their level of experience, EWs also felt that they were underinformed with regard to GAIN. GSWs confirmed that EWs were at times misinforming potential participants about GAIN, and even attributed some program noncompliance to this problem.

Tension between Eligibility and GAIN staff members emerged as a potential concern in our surveys and focus groups. This was partly a matter of poor communication between the two groups of workers. It also resulted from a confluence of factors including (a) the higher pay and status of GAIN workers, (b) the superior work environment generally experienced by GAIN workers, and (c) the relative neglect of Eligibility staff during the drive to meet welfare-to-work program deadlines. In order to patch over several of these problems, DPSS inaugurated a one-time set of Joint Staff Reviews in December 1998 and January 1999. The Joint Staff Reviews brought together workers from CalWORKs District Offices and GAIN Regional Offices to learn more about each others' roles and to help develop relationships between the different groups of workers. This effort did not, however, create an institutional channel for communication nor have any other ongoing outcome.

Final Considerations

DPSS has made substantial progress towards implementing CalWORKs in Los Angeles County. The complexity and novelty of the program, the shortness of deadlines, and the tardiness of implementation guidelines from the federal and state governments have not allowed DPSS to develop as polished a program as DPSS would like. This relative lack of polish, however, can be seen as a virtue. Programs are most changeable while they are in the early stages of implementation. In this evaluation we have had the opportunity to examine CalWORKs while still in the process of development. We hope to contribute to the improvement of CalWORKs by identifying concerns that policy makers can choose to study further and address. Conversely, we have lauded some promising practices, which policy makers can choose to emulate or expand. In mandating this evaluation, the Board of Supervisors recognized both of these needs—to find out what is not working well in order to make interventions, and to

identify what is succeeding, in order to make sure that it is maintained and spread.

Today, DPSS has the resources and the flexibility to experiment with different methods of achieving the goals of welfare reform.

APPENDIX A. SURVEYS OF PARTICIPANTS AND STAFF: SAMPLE REPORT

During December 1998, our CalWORKs Evaluation Team conducted surveys of DPSS clients and staff at CalWORKs District Offices and GAIN Regional Offices. We aimed to examine attitudes, evaluate the quality of service provision, and learn about interaction between staff and clients. We examined the CalWORKs recipients' and GAIN participants' assessments of welfare reform and the accompanying changes in the function of welfare offices. We also examined how staff members assessed these changes.

Sample Design

Recipients and Participants who were targeted for our sample were:

- 1) New CalWORKs applicants (at return appointments only);
- 2) Approved CalWORKs recipients not in GAIN; and
- 3) CalWORKs recipients in GAIN program.

The staff survey sample included:

- 1) Eligibility Workers (both intake and approved);
- 2) GAIN Services Workers;
- 3) Eligibility and GAIN supervisors; and
- 4) Deputy district directors.

Table 0-1. Target and Actual Sample Size for URD Surveys, 1998

<i>A. CalWORKs Recipient and GAIN Participant Surveys</i>		
	Target	Actual
	Sample Size	Sample Size
CalWORKs applicants (return appointments only)	75	40
GAIN participants (Orientation and Job Club)	75	68
GAIN participants (job training limit)	75	0
Approved CalWORKs recipients (not in GAIN)	75	107
Total	300	215
<i>B. CalWORKs and GAIN Staff Surveys</i>		
	Target	Actual
	Sample Size	Sample Size
Eligibility Workers (Intake and Approved)	23	56
Eligibility Supervisors	11	9
GAIN Services Workers	23	70
GAIN Services Supervisors	11	9
Deputy District Directors	7	4
Total	75	148

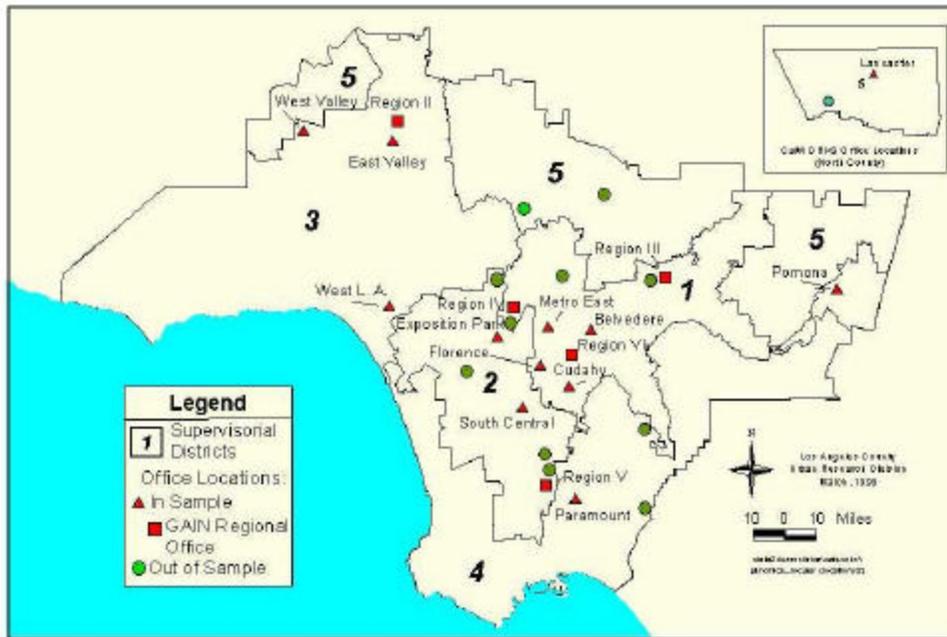
Source: URD CalWORKs Recipient and GAIN Participant Surveys; URD CalWORKs Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

Table 0-1 presents our targets and actual yields for DPSS clients and staff. As the table shows, half of the DPSS clients we interviewed for our surveys were Approved CalWORKs recipients who were not involved in GAIN. We were less successful than we had hoped in getting new CalWORKs applicants and GAIN Job Club participants. Staff interviews did not present any large problems. We did,

however, have more difficulty than expected in securing survey interviews with CalWORKs Eligibility and GAIN Services Supervisors. The supervisors appeared to be extremely busy, and were often absent from their desks. Between staff meetings and assisting individual workers, supervisors appeared to have very little time available for our survey interviews.

A group of CalWORKs Evaluation Team members visited each of the DPSS offices we selected in order to administer surveys to DPSS clients and staff. Twelve CalWORKs District Offices were selected at random to be visited during the first wave of surveys. We also visited all five GAIN Regional Offices (see Figure 0-1 for office locations). In preliminary site visits, we were able to determine that DPSS offices are generally busiest during the first ten days of the month. To be sure that our surveys captured offices at both high and low levels of activity, we spaced out our visits across the entire month.

Figure 0-1. Map of CalWORKs District Offices and GAIN Regional Offices in Los Angeles County, 1998



Source: URD, Department of Public Social Services, 1998

Recruitment Methods

The participation of DPSS clients in our survey was on a strictly volunteer basis. We were initially concerned that clients would be reluctant to participate. Following a suggestion from DPSS, we asked Eligibility and GAIN Services Workers in each office to tell their clients about the survey and ask them to volunteer. We failed to meet our numerical goals using this method of recruiting volunteers. One reason this method proved ineffective, we believe, was that clients had completed their office visit and were eager to leave. We tried approaching DPSS clients directly in each office lobby while they waited to be seen by staff members. Participants were more cooperative than expected, and this proved to be the most effective method for recruiting volunteers. While the first method had the disadvantage of producing too few volunteers, the

disadvantage of this second method was that our volunteers had not yet completed the office visit about which they were being questioned.

On the staff side, our samples of GAIN Services Workers and CalWORKs Eligibility Workers were small but selected at random. GSWs and are EWs are normally assigned to “units” that consist of several workers under one supervisor. Office directors or administrators provided us with staff rosters, and we selected workers at random from within each unit. Choosing from all units within an office helped assure that our results would be representative.

Survey Topics

Separate survey instruments were created for each of the sample populations described above (see Appendix B). Table 0-2 shows the topics that were covered in each survey as well as the battery of questions asked of all.

Table 0-2. Survey Topics and Sample Populations, 1998

Survey Topics	Sample Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Worker Client Interaction• Referral Quality• Support Services• Barriers To Work• Labor Market Perceptions• Need For Support Services• Availability And Access To Transportation And Child Care	All CalWORKs and GAIN Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GAIN Orientation• Job Club• Other Training And Vocational Assessment	GAIN Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perceptions Of Clientele• Management Implementation	All Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change In Work Responsibilities	Eligibility Workers, Supervisors and CalWORKs Deputy District Directors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assessment Of Staff Responsibilities	Supervisors and District Directors

Source: URD CalWORKs Recipient and GAIN Participant Surveys; and URD CalWORKs Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

Basic demographic questions were asked of all participants and staff (e.g., years of education, racial and ethnic background, and age). We asked both GAIN participants and non-GAIN CalWORKs recipients about their employment histories and their perceptions about the labor market. We asked about their access to child care provision and transportation. Likewise, questions regarding quality of service, interaction between participant and worker, referral, and explanation of services, were

asked of all participants. A battery of questions regarding GAIN components, such as Orientation and Job Club, were only asked of GAIN participants.

Eligibility and GAIN staff were asked questions regarding their clients, program effectiveness, and management implementation. However, the former were also asked about changes in work responsibility. Deputy District Directors were asked about their staff and changes in workers' job responsibilities.

Report on the First Wave

The first wave of participant and staff surveys went as smoothly as could be expected. We coordinated survey logistics with DPSS. Our team had some initial difficulties meeting numerical goals, but we were able to boost the total number of surveys completed by paying a second visit to some offices. Table 0-3 and Table 0-4 show that, despite our repeat visits, we were not equally successful in meeting our goals at all offices. There are several explanations for the differences between offices. The first explanation is caseload size. Some of the selected offices served a larger (or poorer) than average community and had a larger caseload. Second, the offices we visited at the busiest time of the month –the first ten days –yielded the largest number of volunteers. Finally, the CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants at some offices were simply more cooperative than those at other offices.

It proved a challenge to obtain sufficient numbers of Spanish-language interviews. While the research team included three fluent Spanish speakers, Latino immigrants were very hesitant to participate. Another reason for our low Spanish language turnout was the fact that many of the Spanish speaking persons in the office told us they were not applying for CalWORKs, but Medi-Cal only. This observation

was confirmed by some of the Eligibility Workers who stated that many of the Spanish-speaking participants were not seeking cash aid assistance.

Table 0-3. Survey Sample Characteristics, Eligibility and GAIN Staff, 1998

	Eligibility Workers	GAIN Services Workers	Eligibility Supervisors	GAIN Services Supervisors
<i>CalWORKs District Offices</i>				
Pomona	5	1	2	0
West Valley	9	5	1	0
East Valley	3	3	1	1
Belvedere	0	1	0	1
Paramount	3	0	0	0
Lancaster	6	0	0	0
Florence	6	0	0	0
West Los Angeles	5	1	0	0
South Central	3	2	2	1
Exposition Park	5	2	1	0
Cudahy	5	1	1	1
Metro East	6	2	0	0
<i>GAIN Regional Offices¹</i>				
GAIN II—Panorama City	0	9	NA	1
GAIN III — El Monte	0	10	NA	1
GAIN IV—Figueroa	0	8	NA	2
GAIN V—Rancho Dominguez	0	14	NA	0
GAIN VI—Bell	0	11	NA	1
Total	56	70	8	9

Source: URD CalWORKs Eligibility Worker and GAIN Services Worker Surveys, 1998

¹ CalWORKs EWs and ESs do not work in GAIN Regional Offices

Table 0-4. Survey Sample Characteristics, CalWORKs Recipients and GAIN Participants, 1998

	CalWORKs Recipients	GAIN Participants	Interviews in Spanish ¹	Avg. Time (minutes)
<i>CalWORKs District Offices</i>				
Pomona	16	1	3	17
West Valley	16	0	1	15
East Valley	7	2	4	14
Belvedere	8	2	0	10
Paramount	3	1	0	14
Lancaster	13	0	1	11
Florence	16	0	1	13
West Los Angeles	14	2	0	10
South Central	19	3	6	10
Exposition Park	11	3	1	11
Cudahy	9	4	3	11
Metro East	15	0	7	12
<i>GAIN Regional Offices²</i>				
GAIN II—Panorama City	0	6	1	10
GAIN III — El Monte	0	11	5	10
GAIN IV—Figueroa	0	12	1	13
GAIN V—Rancho Dominguez	0	9	0	10
GAIN VI—Bell	0	12	4	11
Total	147	68	38	

Source: URD CalWORKs Recipient and GAIN Participant Surveys, 1998

¹ This column gives the total number of Spanish language interviews for each office, including both CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants. No interviews were conducted in a foreign language other than Spanish.

² Non-GAIN CalWORKs recipients were not interviewed at GAIN Regional Offices.

Final Considerations

In order to gain understanding about the characteristics, opinions, or experiences of a large population, social researchers turn to a variety of methods that promise valid and reliable results. Most popular among these methods is the survey of a sample of the population. Choosing population members at random—known as “random sampling”—is the preferred way to generate a sample that is representative of the larger population, but truly random sampling requires that the researcher have equal access to all population members. We were able to draw a modified random sample of staff members for the staff surveys. Most staff members were present in the offices when our teams arrived, and managers gave us staff rosters from which to choose respondents.

For our surveys of CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants, however, our initial intent was to draw a random sample of DPSS CalWORKs clients visiting CalWORKs and GAIN offices. We assumed that clients visiting the offices would be representative in demographic and other relevant characteristics of the larger population. In other words, we were sampling from among one population—participants and recipients visiting offices—to learn about another population. As we conducted the first wave of our surveys, it quickly became evident that the recipients and participants responding to our surveys did not properly represent the whole CalWORKs population. We observed that the likelihood that a given CalWORKs recipient or

GAIN participant would visit a DPSS office decreased as they spent more time in the program, all else being equal. Applying for CalWORKs cash assistance may require several visits to a CalWORKs District Office in a short period of time, but receiving cash aid on an ongoing basis may require no more than a single annual visit for Redetermination. The result was that, relative to the CalWORKs population as a whole, we oversampled new CalWORKs recipients. This is true despite our observation that the proportion of new applicants in our sample was lower than that among the population of recipients visiting CalWORKs offices. Similarly, the new GAIN participant must visit DPSS for Orientation and Appraisal, but if he or she finds stable employment or has entered a long-term SIP, he or she may not visit a DPSS office for a long time. For our GAIN survey, the result was that, relative to the population of all GAIN participants, we oversampled new applicants and those who had difficulties getting into a stable work or welfare-to-work arrangement.

The relative newness of our CalWORKs and GAIN survey respondents has implications, but not all bad ones. One problem that we encountered was that most of our respondents who required CalWORKs supportive services had just applied and had not yet received service or even been referred. On the positive side, while we do not know how well-informed all CalWORKs recipients are about changes in the program, we do know about those who have just had contact with DPSS staff and so *should* be well-informed.

The particular case of people being referred to special services such as Mental Health or Substance Abuse treatment brings up another issue, which is that there are important subpopulations that we simply cannot adequately capture with our surveys of office visitors. CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants who are employed, recipients and participants who have been referred to special services, participants who

are sanctioned for non-compliance, and recipients who have, for one reason or another, left CalWORKs are all groups that are either very small or very unlikely to be found in numbers at CalWORKs or GAIN offices. To learn about these groups, we will need to conduct specially targeted surveys.

APPENDIX B. SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

CalWORKs Recipient Survey

1. At what time did you arrive at the office today? _____		
2. Why did you come to the office today (please circle one): a. To apply for cash aid (return appointment) (<i>go to question 3</i>) b. Had an appointment with Eligibility Worker c. No appointment but needed to see my worker d. Drop off forms e. Other _____		
(ONLY FOR THOSE WHO ARE APPLYING; SKIP OTHERWISE) 3. If you are applying for aid, is this your first time? (<i>if No, please answer 3a</i>) a. If this is not your first time, how many times have you received aid in the in the past five years? _____(PLEASE WRITE IN)	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you some questions regarding the service you received today (PLEASE CIRCLE YES OR NO):		
4. When you first arrived, was the clerk at the window (or information worker) helpful?	Yes	No
5. When you met with the Eligibility Worker, was he/she helpful?	Yes	No
6. Did the Eligibility Worker explain the following changes in welfare: a. You can only receive a total of 5 years of cash aid in your lifetime? b. There is a two year time limit to participate in welfare to work activities? c. Your grant could be reduced by 25% if you fail to cooperate with the District Attorney in pursuit of collecting child support from the absent parent? d. You must show proof that your pre-school age children have been immunized? e. You must show proof that your school age children are attending school?	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	No No No No No
7. Did someone explain to you that you can receive health care through Medi-Cal or Healthy Families without getting cash aid?	Yes	No

8. Did the worker explain to you that you can get help with transportation if you are part of an education/training program or already working? ⁶⁶	Yes	No
9. Was there an opportunity to ask questions during your appointment?	Yes	No
a. Were the questions answered to your satisfaction?	Yes	No
10. At any time during your interview, did you see more than one worker?	Yes	No
a. Why? _____	Yes	No
a. If yes, how many? _____ (PLEASE WRITE IN)	Yes	No
b. Was this a problem?		
11. Did you have any concerns about applying for or continuing your benefits because of immigration status?	Yes	No
12. Were you told you were not eligible for cash aid?	Yes	No
a. If yes, were you referred to other available services or aid?	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you some questions regarding child care and transportation.		
13. Has anyone told you that you can get help with child care while working or in job training? (if no go to 14)	Yes	No
a. Was their explanation clear and easy to understand?	Yes	No
14. Do you have any children under the age of 13 living with you?	Yes	No
15. Are you currently using child care? (if No go to 17)	Yes	No
a. What are your child care arrangements? (please select one)		
a. Family		
b. Neighbor		
c. Friend		
d. School		
e. Church		
f. Day care center		
f. Other _____ (PLEASE WRITE IN)		
16. Are these arrangements meeting your needs? (if yes, go to 21)	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
17. If the County were to pay for child care, what kind of arrangement would you prefer? _____		

18. Have you asked the County for help in finding new/other child care? <i>(if no, go to 21)</i>	Yes	No
19. After you asked, how long was it before you actually received the child care referrals?		

<p>20. Were the referrals helpful in meeting your child care needs <i>(If yes go to 21)</i>?</p> <p>a. If no, which best describes why not? (PLEASE READ FOLLOWING CHOICES):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. trouble with resource and referral agency 2. told there were not enough slots 3. provider does not accept infants or toddlers 4. dislike staff 5. facility unclean and/or unsafe 6. too far from home or work 7. unavailable public transportation 8. Other (specify) _____ 	Yes	No
<p>21. Have you asked the County for help in paying your child care? <i>(if no, skip to 24)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>22. Did you complete the request forms needed by County to pay for your child care?</p> <p>a. If no, which best describes why you did not complete the forms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. forms hard to understand 2. lost the forms 3. did not have time to fill them out 4. Never received forms from worker <p><i>(If answers 22a, please go to 25)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>23. Has your provider expressed to you any problems they have experienced with receiving payments from the County?</p> <p>a. If yes, what are those problems? _____</p> <p><i>(Yes or No to 23 --Please skip next question)</i></p>	Yes	No

24. Which of the following reasons best describes why you are not receiving referrals or payments for child care from this office: 1. Do not need assistance 2. Too much hassle to apply for assistance with child care 3. Could not find care provider who would accept DPSS reimbursement 4. Paperwork was delayed by welfare office 5. Was not aware that assistance with child care was available 6. Did not think I qualified for assistance with child care 7. DPSS will not pay my provider 8. Other _____		
25. Do you have access to a car?	Yes	No
26. Do you use public transportation? <i>(if answer No, please go to q. 31)</i>	Yes	No
27. If you use public transportation, is the stop near your home?	Yes	No
28. Does it arrive often?	Yes	No
29. Does it run on the hours you need it?	Yes	No
30. Is it safe for you to take the bus, particularly at night?	Yes	No
31. Have you received help from this office for your transportation needs such as gas money, bus fare, or transportation? <i>(if No, skip to 33)</i>	Yes	No
32. Does the help you receive from this office for transportation help you with things like looking for a job, getting to child care, going to school or job training program? a. If no, why not?	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you questions regarding work and your work history (write in or circle correct answer):		
33. Are you currently working? <i>(if yes, go to question 37)</i>	Yes	No
34. Have you ever worked? <i>(If No, go to 36).</i>	Yes	No
35. When was the last time you worked? _____		
36. If you are not working, are you currently looking for work? <i>(go to 39)</i>	Yes	No
37. How long have you worked at your current job? _____ a. Are you satisfied with your current job?	Yes	No
38. What is your job title?_____		

39. Are you currently in school or a job training program? <i>(if yes, please go 40)</i>	Yes	No
a. Have you ever been in a job training program?	Yes	No
b. Would you like to be in school or part of a job training program?	Yes	No
40. Do you have access to a car or public transportation to travel to or look for work?	Yes	No
41. Do you think there are jobs available that will help you get off of welfare?	Yes	No
42. Do you think you are qualified for these kinds of jobs?	Yes	No
43. What do you think are the reasons it is difficult for you to find or a keep a job?		
These next questions will refer to supportive services.		
44. Did the worker also explain to you that if you are eligible for aid you can receive help with the following:		
a. Substance Abuse treatment for drug and alcohol problems?	Yes	No
b. Mental Health Services that include help with depression, stress or emotional problems?	Yes	No
c. Domestic violence support services for help dealing with physical or emotional abuse?	Yes	No
45. Do you think the worker's explanation of the services available for substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence support were understandable?	Yes	No
a. Did you feel comfortable discussing these topics with your worker?	Yes	No

46. Did you request help for any of the following supportive services: <i>(if No to all of #46, please go to 54)</i>		
a. Domestic violence?	Yes	No
b. Substance abuse?	Yes	No
c. Mental Health?	Yes	No
47. Did you see a GAIN worker the same day you requested help with any of the above services?	Yes	No
48. How long was it after you asked for help that you actually received the service?		
49. Are you satisfied with how this welfare office referred you to these services?	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
50. Can you easily get to these services by car or public transportation?	Yes	No
51. Are you satisfied with the help you have received for domestic violence, mental health, or substance abuse? (PROBE FOR SATISFACTION WITH FACILITIES AND STAFF)	Yes	No
a. If no, why not		
52. Do you believe that receiving this service will help your ability and confidence to work?	Yes	No
53. What would you change if you could about this provider of supportive services?		
These last questions will be about you and your background		
54. What is your racial or ethnic background? (please circle one)		
a. African American/Black		
b. Latino/Hispanic		
c. White		
d. Asian		
e. Other, please specify_____		

55. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (please circle one)		
a. less than a high school diploma		
b. high school diploma/GED		
c. high school degree and some college		
d. community college degree		
e. vocational degree		
f. Bachelor's or higher		
56. Age on last birthday_____		
57. What languages do you speak at home? _____		
58. What is your marital status? _____		
59. How many people live in your house? _____		
60. How many children under 18 do you have living at home? _____		
61. Are you currently exempt from participating in GAIN? (<i>if no go to 61</i>)	Yes	No
a. For what reason have you been exempted? _____		
62. Sex of Respondent _____		
63. Do you have any additional comments about your experience here in this office? About the changes in requirements, time limits? Referral process for child care, supportive services?		

GAIN Participant Survey (Orientation)

1. At what time did you arrive at the office today? _____		
2. Why did you come to the office today (please circle one): a. I had an appointment with GAIN worker (<i>please go to 2a</i>) b No appointment with worker, but needed to see my worker a. What type of appointment do you have? _____ b. Is this your first, second, or third scheduled appointment? _____		
3. Have you ever had your aid reduced? a. If yes, why?	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you some questions regarding the service you received in this office:		
4. When you first arrived, was the clerk at the window helpful?	Yes	No
5. When you met with the GAIN worker, was he/she helpful?	Yes	No
6. Did the worker explain changes in welfare such as: a. You can only receive total of 5 years of cash aid in your lifetime? b. There is a two year time limit to participate in welfare to work activities?	Yes Yes	No No
7. Did the worker explain that while on aid you can go to school or get training if this would lead to employment?	Yes	No
8. Did the worker explain to you that you could get help with transportation if you are working or part of an education or job training program	Yes	No
9. Did staff clearly explain what are welfare to work activities? a. Did they explain to you that while on aid you would have to work or participate in “welfare to work” activities for 32 hours a week?	Yes Yes	No No
10. Did someone explain to you that you can receive health care through Medi-Cal or Healthy Families?	Yes	No
11. Was there an opportunity to ask questions during your interview? a. Were these questions answered?	Yes Yes	No No
12. At any time during your interview, did you see more than one worker? a. If yes, how many? _____ b. Was this a problem?	Yes Yes	No No

13. Did you have any concerns about applying for or continuing your benefits because of immigration status?		
Now I would like to ask you some questions about the GAIN orientation.		
14. Were you able to get to the Orientation easily by car or by public transportation?	Yes	No
15. If you drove a car was parking available?	Yes	No
16. Was the Orientation staff courteous?	Yes	No
17. Was the presentation of the program understandable?	Yes	No
18. Was the presentation given in a language you could understand?	Yes	No
19. Were there any handouts given to you at the Orientation?	Yes	No
a. Were they written in a language you could understand?	Yes	No
b. Were they clear and easy to understand?	Yes	No
20. Did the Orientation staff explain the handouts?	Yes	No
21. Was there an opportunity to ask questions?	Yes	No
a. Did these questions get answered?	Yes	No
22. Did you feel that the Orientation staff was motivating and supportive?	Yes	No
23. Do you feel that the Orientation provided you motivation?	Yes	No
24. Comments/Suggestions:		
Now I would like to ask you some questions regarding child care and transportation.		
25. Has anyone told you that you can get help with child care while working or in job training? (if no go to 26)	Yes	No
a. Was their explanation clear and easy to understand?	Yes	No
26. Do you have any children under the age of 13 living with you?	Yes	No

<p>27. Are you currently using child care? <i>(if No go to 29)</i></p> <p>a. What are your child care arrangements? <i>(please select one)</i></p> <p>1. Family</p> <p>2. Neighbor</p> <p>3. Friend</p> <p>4. School</p> <p>5. Church</p> <p>6. Day care center</p> <p>7. Other _____ (PLEASE WRITE IN)</p>	Yes	No
<p>28. Are these arrangements meeting your needs? <i>(if yes, go to 33)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>29. If the County were to pay for child care, what kind of arrangement would you prefer? _____</p>		
<p>30. Have you asked the County for help in finding new/other child care? <i>(if no, go to 33)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>31. After you asked, how long was it before you actually received the child care referrals?</p>		

<p>32. Were the referrals helpful in meeting your child care needs <i>(If yes go to 33)</i>?</p> <p>a. If no, which best describes why not? (PLEASE READ FOLLOWING CHOICES):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. trouble with resource and referral agency 2. told there were not enough slots 3. provider does not accept infants or toddlers 4. dislike staff 5. facility unclean and/or unsafe 6. too far from home or work 7. unavailable public transportation 8. Other (specify) _____ 	Yes	No
<p>33. Have you asked the County for help in paying your child care? <i>(if no, skip to 36)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>34. Did you complete the request forms needed by County to pay for your child care?</p> <p>a. If no, which best describes why you did not complete the forms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. forms hard to understand 2. lost the forms 3. did not have time to fill them out 4. Never received forms from worker <p><i>(if answers 34a please go to 37)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>35. Has your provider expressed to you any problems they have experienced with receiving payments from the County?</p> <p>a. If yes, what are those problems? _____</p> <p><i>(if yes or no, please to 37)</i></p>	Yes	No

36. Which of the following reasons best describes why you are not receiving help for child care from this office: 1. Do not need child care 2. Too much hassle to apply for assistance with child care 3. Could not find care provider who would accept DPSS reimbursement 4. Paperwork was delayed by welfare office 5. Was not aware that assistance with child care was available 6. Didn't think I qualified for assistance with child care 7. DPSS won't pay my provider 8. Other _____		
37. Do you have access to a car?	Yes	No
38. Do you use public transportation? (if answer No, please go to q. 43)	Yes	No
39. If you use public transportation, is the stop near your home?	Yes	No
40. Does it arrive often?	Yes	No
41. Does it run on the hours you need it?	Yes	No
42. Is it safe for you to use public transportation, particularly at night?	Yes	No
43. Have you received help from this office for your transportation needs such as gas money, bus fare, or transportation? (if No, skip to 45)	Yes	No
44. Does the help you receive from this office for transportation help you with things like looking for a job, getting to child care, going to school or job training program? a. If no, why not?	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you questions about work and your work history (please circle or fill in answer):		
45. Are you currently working? (if yes, go to question 49)	Yes	No
46. Have you ever worked? (If No, go to 48).	Yes	No
47. When was the last time you worked? _____		
48 If you are not working, are you currently looking for work? (go to 51)	Yes	No
49. How long have you worked at your current job? _____ a. Are you satisfied with your current job?	Yes	No
50. What is your job title?_____		

51. Are you currently in school or a job training program? <i>(if yes, please go 52)</i>	Yes	No
a. Have you ever been in a job training program?	Yes	No
b. Would you like to be in school or part of a job training program?	Yes	No
52. Do you have access to a car or public transportation to travel to or look for work?	Yes	No
53. Do you think there are jobs available to help you get off of welfare?	Yes	No
54. Do you think you are qualified for these kinds of jobs?	Yes	No
55. What do you think are the reasons it is difficult for you to find or a keep a job?		
These next questions will refer to those who have received any supportive services.		
56. Did the worker also explain that when you participate in GAIN you can receive help with the following:		
a. Substance Abuse treatment for drug and alcohol problems?	Yes	No
b. Mental health services that include help with depression, stress and Emotional problems?	Yes	No
c. Domestic violence support services for help dealing with physical or emotional abuse?	Yes	No
57. Do you think the worker's explanation of the services available for substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence were understandable?	Yes	No
a. Did you feel comfortable discussing these issues with your worker?	Yes	No
58. Did you request help for any of the following supportive services: <i>(if No to all of #58, please go to #66)</i>		
a. Domestic violence?	Yes	No
b. Substance abuse?	Yes	No
c. Mental Health?	Yes	No
59. Did you see a specialized worker the same day you requested help with any of the above services?	Yes	No
60. How long was it after you asked for help that you actually received the service?		
61. Are you satisfied with how this welfare office referred you to these services?	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
62. Can you easily get to these services by car or public transportation?	Yes	No

63. Are you satisfied with the help you have received for domestic violence, mental health, or substance abuse? (PROBE FOR SATISFACTION WITH FACILITIES AND STAFF) a. If no, why not?	Yes	No
64. Do you believe that receiving this service will help your ability and confidence to work?	Yes	No
65. What would you change if you could about this provider of supportive services?		
These last questions will be about you and your background.		
66. What is your racial or ethnic background (please circle one): a. African American/Black b. Latino/Hispanic c. White d. Asian e. Other, please specify _____		
67. What is the highest level of education you have completed ? (please circle one) a. less than a high school diploma b. high school diploma/GED c. high school diploma and some college d. community college degree e. vocational degree f. bachelor's degree or higher		
68. Age at last birthday _____		
69. What languages do you speak at home? _____		
70. What is your marital status? _____		
71. How many people live in your house? _____		
72. How many children under 18 do you have living at home? _____		
73. Sex of Respondent _____		
74. Any other comments or suggestions you would like to make about Orientation, training, or welfare in general?		

GAIN Participant Survey (Job Club/Educational or Vocational Training)

1. At what time did you arrive at the office today? _____		
2. Why did you come to the office today (please circle one): a. I had an appointment with GAIN worker (<i>please go to 2a</i>) b. No appointment with worker, but needed to see my worker a. What type of appointment do you have? _____ b. Is this your first, second, or third scheduled appointment? _____		
3. Have you ever had your aid reduced? a. If yes, why? _____	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you some questions regarding your experience with GAIN:		
4. When you first arrived, was the clerk at the window helpful?	Yes	No
5. When you met with the GAIN worker, was he/she helpful?	Yes	No
6. Did the worker explain changes in welfare such as: a. You can only receive a total of 5 years of cash aid in your lifetime? b. There is a two year time limit to participate in welfare to work activities?	Yes Yes	No No
7. Did the worker explain that while on aid you can go to school or get training if this would lead to employment?	Yes	No
8. Did the worker explain to you that you could get help with transportation if you are part working or part of an education or job training program?	Yes	No
9. Did staff clearly explain what welfare to work activities are? a. Did they tell you that while on cash aid you have to work or participate in a welfare to work activity for at least 32 hours a week unless you are exempt?	Yes Yes	No No
10. Did someone explain to you that you can receive health care through Medi-Cal or Healthy Families?	Yes	No
11. Was there an opportunity to ask questions during your interview? a. Were these questions answered?	Yes Yes	No No
12. During this visit, were you interviewed by more than one worker? a. If yes, how many? _____ b. Was this a problem?	Yes Yes	No No

13. Did you have any concerns about applying for or continuing your benefits because of immigration status?	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you questions about Job Club, job training and educational classes (please answer if you have participated in any one of these)		

14. What is the most recent activity you participated in:		
a. Job Club?	Yes	No
b. Vocational training?	Yes	No
c. Educational training?	Yes	No
15. Could you easily get to the class by car or public transportation?	Yes	No
16. Did it help you get a job? <i>(if no go to 17)</i>	Yes	No
a. Are you still working? <i>(if yes, go to 23)</i>	Yes	No
17. Do you think it will help you get a job in the future?	Yes	No
18. Do you think it will give you the help you need to compete in the job market?	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
19. Do you think it will help you find a job better than you could get on your own?	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
20. Is this activity helping you to get a job in the field you are interested in pursuing?	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
21. Has your GAIN worker or job developer provided you with any job leads? <i>(if no, go to #22)</i>	Yes	No
a. Were these leads for the types of jobs you think you can do?	Yes	No
b. Were there any job openings or were they dead end leads? _____ <i>(select)</i>		
22. How many job interviews are you required to have a week? _____	Yes	No
a. Do you think these expectations are realistic/doable?		
23. If you have searched for a job, have employers treated you professionally?	Yes	No
24. Suggestions/Comments:		
Now I would like to ask you some questions regarding child care and transportation.		
25. Has anyone told you that you can get help with child care while working or in job training? <i>(if no go to 26)</i>	Yes	No
a. Was their explanation clear and easy to understand?		
26. Do you have any children under the age of 13 living with you?	Yes	No

<p>27. Are you currently using child care? <i>(if No go to 29)</i></p> <p>a. What are your child care arrangements? <i>(please select one)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family 2. Neighbor 3. Friend 4. School 5. Church 6. Day care center 7. Other _____ (PLEASE WRITE IN) 	Yes	No
<p>28. Are these arrangements meeting your needs? <i>(if yes, go to 33)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>29. If the County were to pay for child care, what kind of arrangement would you prefer? _____</p>		
<p>30. Have you asked the County for help in finding new/other child care? <i>(if no, go to 33)</i></p>	Yes	No
<p>31. After you asked, how long was it before you actually received the child care referrals?</p>		
<p>32. Were the referrals helpful in meeting your child care needs <i>(If yes go to 33)</i>?</p> <p>a. If no, which best describes why not? (PLEASE READ FOLLOWING CHOICES):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. trouble with resource and referral agency 2. told there were not enough slots 3. provider does not accept infants or toddlers 4. dislike staff 5. facility unclean and/or unsafe 6. too far from home or work 7. unavailable public transportation 8. Other (specify) _____ 	Yes	No
<p>33. Have you asked the County for help in paying your child care? <i>(if no, skip to 36)</i></p>	Yes	No

34. Did you complete the request forms needed by County to pay for your child care? a. If no, which best describes why you did not complete the forms: 1. forms hard to understand 2. lost the forms 3. did not have time to fill them out 4. Never received forms from worker <i>(if answers 34a please go to 37)</i>	Yes	No
35. Has your provider expressed to you any problems they have experienced with receiving payments from the County? a. If yes, what are those problems? _____ <i>(if yes or no, please to 37)</i>	Yes	No
36. Which of the following reasons best describes why you are not receiving help for child care from this office: 1. Do not need child care 2. Too much hassle to apply for assistance with child care 3. Could not find care provider who would accept DPSS reimbursement 4. Paperwork was delayed by welfare office 5. Was not aware that assistance with child care was available 6. Didn't think I qualified for assistance with child care 7. DPSS won't pay my provider 8. Other _____		
37. Do you have access to a car?	Yes	No
38. Do you use public transportation? <i>(if answer No, please go to q. 43)</i>	Yes	No
39. If you use public transportation, is the stop near your home?	Yes	No
40. Does it arrive often?	Yes	No
41. Does it run on the hours you need it?	Yes	No
42. Is it safe for you to use public transportation, particularly at night?	Yes	No
43. Have you received help from this office for your transportation needs such as gas money, bus fare, or transportation? <i>(if No, skip to 45)</i>	Yes	No

44. Does the help you receive from this office for transportation help you with things like looking for a job, getting to child care, going to school or job training program? a. If no, why not?	Yes	No
Now I would like to ask you questions about work and your work history (please circle or fill in answer):		
45. Are you currently working? <i>(if yes, go to question 49)</i>	Yes	No
46. Have you ever worked? <i>(If No, go to 48).</i>	Yes	No
47. When was the last time you worked? _____		
48. If you are not working, are you currently looking for work? <i>(go to 51)</i>	Yes	No
49. How long have you worked at your current job? _____ a. Are you satisfied with your current job?	Yes	No
50. What is your job title? _____		
51. Are you currently in school or a job training program? <i>(if yes, please go 52)</i> a. Have you ever been in a job training program? b. Would you like to be in school or part of a job training program?	Yes Yes Yes	No No No
52. Do you have access to a car or public transportation to travel to or look for work?	Yes	No
53. Do you think there are jobs available to help you get off of welfare?	Yes	No
54. Do you think you are qualified for these kinds of jobs?	Yes	No
55. What do you think are the reasons it is difficult for you to find or a keep a job?		
These next questions will refer to those who have received any supportive services.		
56. Did the worker also explain that when you participate in GAIN you can receive help with the following: a. Substance Abuse treatment for drug and alcohol problems? b. Mental health services that include help with depression, stress and Emotional problems? c. Domestic violence support services for help dealing with physical or emotional abuse?	Yes Yes Yes	No No No
57. Do you think the worker's explanation of the services available for substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence were understandable? a. Did you feel comfortable discussing these issues with your worker?	Yes Yes	No No

58. Did you request help for any of the following supportive services: <i>(if No to all of #58, please go to #66)</i>		
a. Domestic violence?	Yes	No
b. Substance abuse?	Yes	No
c. Mental Health?	Yes	No
59. Did you see a specialized worker the same day you requested help with any of the above services?	Yes	No
60. How long was it after you asked for help that you actually received the service?		
61. Are you satisfied with how this welfare office referred you to these services?	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
62. Can you easily get to these services by car or public transportation?	Yes	No
63. Are you satisfied with the help you have received for domestic violence, mental health, or substance abuse? (PROBE FOR SATISFACTION WITH FACILITIES AND STAFF)	Yes	No
a. If no, why not?		
64. Do you believe that receiving this service will help your ability and confidence to work?	Yes	No
65. What would you change if you could about this provider of supportive services?		
These last questions will be about you and your background.		
66. What is your racial or ethnic background (please circle one):		
a. African American/Black		
b. Latino/Hispanic		
c. White		
d. Asian		
e. Other, please specify_____		

67. What is the highest level of education you have completed ? (please circle one) a. less than a high school diploma b. high school diploma/GED c. high school diploma and some college d. community college degree e. vocational degree f. bachelor's degree or higher		
68. Age at last birthday _____		
69. What languages do you speak at home? _____		
70. What is your marital status? _____		
71. How many people live in your house? _____		
72. How many children under 18 do you have living at home? _____		
73. Sex of Respondent _____		
73. Any other comments or suggestions you would like to make about Orientation, training, or welfare in general?		

APPENDIX C. FOCUS GROUP METHODS

This Appendix has two objectives:

1. To provide a general explanation of our qualitative methodology and research design; and
2. To describe the specific research done for this report, including selection of sites and target groups; recruitment of focus group members; and conduct of the focus groups.

A Qualitative Evaluation Research Design

Purpose and Advantages of a Qualitative Methodology

Quantitative survey methods assess the prevalence of attitudes and experiences at a low level of detail, according to categories and questions determined in advance by the researchers. The advantage of this methodology, when applied correctly, is the ability to represent an entire population so that analytical conclusions are easily generalizable.

Smaller in scope and detailed in the description of particular practices and experiences, qualitative research offers different advantages. Within the limits of our qualitative methodology, we have endeavored to include individuals representative of selected demographic characteristics of the larger CalWORKs and GAIN populations. The main advantage of our qualitative focus group methodology, however, is that it yields an in-depth understanding of the meaning and effectiveness of organizational practices from the lived experiences of the people most directly affected by welfare reform—GAIN participants, GAIN Services Workers, and their Supervisors. Our

methods compliment surveys and other quantitative methods by giving a concrete sense of how things really happen and revealing the unexamined link between individual actions and the broad patterns that can be revealed in quantitative data. Also, by giving voice to the evaluated and thereby validating their knowledge and experience, qualitative methods can engage their interest and involve them in making the program work more effectively.

Longitudinal Research Design for Participants

The most appropriate way of capturing the transition from welfare-to-work would be to observe the process over time in natural settings where clients interact with Services Workers, with each other, and with their families and friends. The next best thing to making time-consuming and costly ethnographic observations is to conduct focus groups in which we ask people for detailed descriptions of these experiences and their responses to them. Because we are interested in how clients move through the program over time, we have implemented a longitudinal approach to focus groups.

By “longitudinal method” we mean recruiting a cohort of participants at the beginning of their career in GAIN and tracking them as they pass through later stages. This approach has several advantages over recruiting new cohorts of clients at different stages in the program over the course of the study period:

1. By following the same clients over time, we can identify how social contexts contribute to different outcomes — i.e., client successes and failures in reaching goals of the program - and how the effects of context change over time;

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2. Following clients over time recognizes that the transition from welfare-to-work is a developmental, emergent process for both clients and agencies and permits the identification of critical junctures or turning points;
 3. Allowing people to talk about their immediate experiences avoids the potential distortion that arises when people attempt to rely on memory to recall what happened in the more distant past;
 4. Repeated meetings are more likely to build up trust, cooperation, involvement that lead to greater self-disclosure than a onetime focus group;
 5. The longitudinal method moves us closer to a causal analysis of successes and failures by relating past experiences and changes in experiences as GAIN participants face new and different obstacles and problems encountered during different stages in the transition from welfare-to-work;
 6. Following clients over time will permit agencies to implement changes in their practice based on client feedback during the course of the evaluation that can subsequently be reassessed with the same client group; and finally,
 7. Following the same group of people over time allows us to understand the impact on participants of single components of the program as well as their cumulative effects and the links between them.

For example, the longitudinal design will enable us to assess the long-term impact of the motivational aspects of Orientation in the context of subsequent experiences that may either reinforce or detract from the participant's success in going from welfare-to-work.

To implement our longitudinal plan, we are conducting three waves of participant focus groups (see Table 0-5 on page 203). The first wave included participants who had just entered the GAIN program by attending the GAIN Orientation and Appraisal. The second and third waves monitor the progress of this

original cohort at a midpoint and endpoint of our evaluation cycle. Should participants drop out of the program, we will add people to the original focus group cohort to make sure that significant stages are covered.

Supplemental Focus Groups with GSW and GSW Supervisors

During the first wave of participant focus groups, we also conducted focus groups with GAIN Services Workers and Supervisors (shown in Table 0-5 on page 203). Here our sample selection has been task-specific rather than longitudinal. We do not intend to follow these groups over time. It is true that their work environment and job tasks remain in flux, but this is not our primary interest. Our objective was to ask GSWs and their Supervisors for their evaluation of practices affecting participants at different points of their careers and in different components of the program. In this report, their answers were reported mainly in relation to issues raised by the first wave of participants.

Focus Group Design and Schedule

In order to maximize interaction between participants, the ideal focus group size is roughly six to seven people. The maximum number of interviewed participants in our study will be about 112 (seven people each in 16 focus groups).

Table 0-5. Planned and Actual Focus Groups Conducted, 1998-99

	Wave I	Wave II	Wave III
	Entry Issues	Midpoint	Final Issues
	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Planned</i>	<i>Planned</i>
	December 1998	Feb./March 1999	May/June 1999
GAIN Participants	4	4	4
GAIN Services Workers	2	0	0
GAIN Supervisors	2	0	0
Total	8	4	4

Source: URD GAIN Participant, GAIN Services Worker, and GAIN Services Supervisor Focus Groups, 1998-99

Implementation of the Research Design

Selection of Research Sites

We had originally planned to conduct focus groups at two CalWORKs District Offices that were representative of two major participant groups in the larger welfare population: African Americans and Latinos (both Spanish-speaking immigrants and more established or native-born English-speaking Latinos). However, after consulting with staff of DPSS and Urban Research, we decided to select two Regional Offices within these districts. We had three practical reasons for selecting GAIN rather than District Offices. First, the demographic characteristics of populations served by the GAIN Regional Offices approximate those of the District Offices. Secondly, the Regional Offices provided us with a larger pool of GAIN participants, GSWs, and Gain Supervisors than did the District Offices. Third, since the Regional Offices generally

served populations who had been on AFDC before the April 1998 beginning of welfare reform, they provided us with a larger pool of participants who had been on AFDC and familiar with the “culture of welfare,” factors possibly affecting their transition to work.

We are not specifically identifying offices by name in order to protect the good will and anonymity of the people who participated in our research and to counter any implication that particular sites were targeted for evaluation. They were not. We were merely looking for sites that were demographically significant in terms of the larger County population. The data from our sites are aggregated and not reported separately.

Sample Selection

Our selection of participants, GSWs, and Supervisors was made in close consultation with GAIN regional directors. By informing them about our research, DPSS staff greatly facilitated our contacts with them. Their support of the evaluation project, and valuable advice and cooperation they gave were essential to the successful conduct of our research. For example, we suspected that participants would be difficult to involve in our research unless the process of their recruitment and selection and the conduct of focus groups were built into their GAIN activities. The directors and their staff made this possible by asking LACOE staff to allow us to recruit participants during their Orientation. The directors also provided space at their GAIN Regional Offices for the focus groups as well as child care and transportation support for qualified members of our focus groups.

Participants

Thus with the full cooperation of regional directors and LACOE instructors, we recruited participants during their Orientation. This meant attending four different

Orientation sessions, two at each of the selected GAIN Regional Offices. The size of the Orientation groups ranged from 15-30 at one office and 50-100 at the other. The smaller number at one office was probably due to the fact that we did our recruiting there late in the week when Orientation sessions are usually smaller.

In both offices, after the Orientation, the instructor introduced us. We spoke to the assembled participants, stressing the importance of the research project and opportunity to add their voices to the evaluation. We assured them about anonymity and explained that their unidentified statements would be included in our reports and passed on to the policy-making level. We also mentioned other incentives in addition to civic duty and making a difference, such as child care and transportation support and a \$50.00 food voucher, which would not be counted against their income.

We asked volunteers to sign up at the noon break, and they did so in more than sufficient numbers. From these pools of volunteers, we selected 6-8 participants for each focus group. Insofar as possible, they were representative of the diversity of the Orientation groups in terms of gender, age, and race/ethnicity. In one office, we were advised to ask participants to come to the focus groups a day or two after Orientation day. At the second office, we were able to recruit participants and conducted their focus groups on the same day. The first arrangement worked fairly well, but the second drew more participants to the focus groups. It's always best to catch people on the spot, rather than to expect them to come back on another day.

Our recruitment of participants for the Spanish-speaking focus group varied slightly from the above mode. Since the co-contractors, Linda Shaw and John Horton, were not fluent in Spanish, we hired a very competent researcher and social worker to do the job of recruiting with our training and supervision.

GSWs and GSW Supervisors

On the advice of the regional directors, we selected GSWs and GSW Supervisors who had been on their jobs for at least six months. We wanted focus group members with experience on the job and in the Regional Offices. As with the case of participants, we strove for representation. Within each office, we selected workers and supervisors from different units and sought representation in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and language skills.

Recruiting GSWs and their Supervisors was more difficult and time-consuming than recruiting participants because our method was less direct and face-to-face. We tried to reach them by telephone during their work hours. As we learned from the participants, this is no easy task. Much of the time, we left a message which was not returned. Later in the focus groups, we heard the reason from the workers and supervisors: they have caseloads and are in fact very busy. However, we persisted in our calling. Once we reached them, GSWs and Supervisors were usually willing to attend a focus group, especially if they had heard about it from their boss. Moreover, their participation was greatly facilitated by the fact that the directors allowed the focus groups to take place during their workday. Once again, we learned that the conduct of the research works best when it is woven into the program.

Conducting the Focus Group

Format

Each focus group lasted from one and one half to two hours. Both researchers facilitated the English-speaking groups. The Spanish-language participant group was conducted by a Spanish-speaking moderator. Focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed. Prior to the beginning of each group, we asked members to complete a

questionnaire asking about background demographic information (i.e., age, race, gender, work history, prior experience on welfare, etc.) and to sign a Consent Form describing the study and their rights as research subjects.

We began each group with a description of the focus group session, including the format of the group, the topics that would be discussed, and how the information would be used. In an attempt to encourage candor, we further explained that we did not work for DPSS but were there as researchers who would provide feedback to those who made policy concerning the effectiveness of the GAIN program. We emphasized how important it is to represent the voices of those that experience and deliver GAIN services. Guarantying the anonymity of Focus Group members is crucial if researchers are to build the level of trust that leads to in-depth recounting of experience. Therefore, we explained that the names of focus group members would be changed in the final report in order to maintain the confidentiality of responses.

Finally, before beginning the group, we established several procedures or “ground rules” aimed at achieving candor and comprehensiveness in focus group member responses while protecting privacy. For example, it is often the case that some members of a group will be more outspoken in expressing their experiences and viewpoints than others. Therefore, we asked each member of the group to respond in turn to the questions in order to represent a range of experiences and to minimize the likelihood that the more vocal group members would influence others’ responses. Moreover, if focus group members are to be candid, they must feel a level of safety and respect. Thus, we talked to group members about the importance of observing common courtesy, emphasizing the value of expressing differing experiences and opinions while respecting those with whom they disagree.

Focus Group Questions

Focus groups are essentially extended group interviews. For our initial focus groups, we developed a set of questions based on our observations of GAIN Orientation sessions, and on suggestions from DPSS and others. Since the purpose of focus groups is to maximize the disclosure of group members' experiences and priorities, we introduced general, open-ended questions and topics related to the area of *promising practices*. Examples of questions that were posed included: "How did you first learn about the GAIN Program?" "What information would you like to have received that you didn't get?" "Describe your first contact with the Program—what happened?" "If you were running the Program, what would you do differently?" (See complete focus group instrument included in this Appendix). After asking each group member to respond to a question, we formulated detailed follow-up questions based on the issues they had raised.

We initially followed the questionnaire schedule very closely, making certain to ask each member to respond to the questions in the order of their appearance on the focus group questionnaire. However, in assessing these groups, we felt that while focus group members had provided valuable information, the answers to questions were less detailed and comprehensive than we had hoped. Focus group members largely limited their answers to the issues we had raised rather than, as we had hoped, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences by discussing aspects of GAIN practices that our questions had not anticipated. This assessment led us to vary our procedure in subsequent groups. We began by asking focus group members to tell us as much as they could remember about what they experienced and felt about GAIN, starting with receipt of the letter directing them to report to GAIN Orientation, and continuing through their most recent GAIN experiences. Building on their accounts, we

followed up with probes asking members to discuss issues from the questionnaire that had not been addressed. In this way, we attempted to maximize both the range and variety of responses among focus group members as well as to acquire a comprehensive understanding of experiences regarding core issues related to GAIN practices.

Additional Notes on the First Wave

We had originally intended to hold focus groups with Eligibility Workers and their supervisors during the first wave, and then hold groups with GAIN workers in the second wave. After some deliberation, however, we decided that understanding the experiences of GAIN participants required that we needed to hold groups with GAIN workers during the first wave. The Eligibility Worker groups were indefinitely postponed.

We should also note that we were able to meet minimum recruitment goals for all of our groups excluding the very first participant group. For that group, our turnout was only four participants. The two additional English-language groups had eight members, and the Spanish language group had nine. The GSW and GSW supervisor groups included eight members each, except for one group of six. Some demographics on the GAIN participant and GAIN staff focus groups are shown in Table 0-6.

Table 0-6. Characteristics of Focus Group Participants, 1998

	GAIN Participants		GAIN Staff	
	Percent	# of Persons	Percent	# of Persons
Sex				
Male	21%	6	36%	10
Female	79%	22	64%	18
Race/Ethnicity				
Latino	54%	15	21%	6
African-American	39%	11	29%	8
Asian-American	0%	0	29%	8
Euro-American/Middle Eastern	0%	0	21%	6
Other	7%	2	0%	0
Education				
Less than High School	21%	16		
Some High School	36%	10		
High school graduate	11%	3		
Some College	29%	8		
College Graduate	3%	1		
Worked in last two years				
Yes	39%	11		
No	61%	17		
Participated in GAIN before				
Yes	39%	11		
No	61%	17		
# of Responses		28		28

Source: URD GAIN Participant, GAIN Services Worker, and GAIN Services Supervisor Focus Groups, 1998

Note: Information was not reported for one GAIN participant.

APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions: GAIN Services Workers and GAIN Supervisors

Introduction

1. Welcome. Our purpose in conducting this focus group is to help evaluate the effectiveness of GAIN practices — to understand the ones that are working well and the ones that are in need of improvement. In doing this, we want to focus on your day to day work with participants as you attempt to assist them to move from welfare-to-work. We will be asking you to talk about such things as: What do you perceive as the participants' greatest needs? How you attempt to meet them? What practices seem to be working and which do not seem to be working? And finally, we are interested in your ideas about how things could be improved.
2. Pass out a brief questionnaire name; age, level of education, work history length of time at this Office, other jobs held in the County, where, how long (approximate).
3. Consent Form and why necessary.
4. The rules of the group: everyone gets to speak, nobody can dominate the conversation, one person speaks at a time, great to disagree, but be courteous, maintain confidentiality of group responses.
5. What we will do with the information.

Questions Specific to GAIN Services Workers

1. First let's go around the room, to see what you do in an ordinary work day. We are interested less in your formal job description and what it says about what you do, than in what you actually do, your real practices, how you do them.
 - (a) On an average, how many participants do you see or talk to in a day and week and what the nature of your contacts with participants?

-
2. What are your participants' greatest needs when they attempt to go from welfare-to-work? Thinking of it another way, what do you think are the greatest obstacles that participants face when they attempt to go from welfare-to-work?
 3. We would like to know how well you feel you are able to meet those needs — what works and the obstacles you face.
 - (a) Give an example of something you tried to meet those needs that worked? What was your strategy, and what happened? (e.g., Reaching a job quota? Motivating a client? Sanctioning a client?) What happened?
 - (b) What do you think contributed to your success?
 - (c) Give an example of something you tried to meet participant needs that did not work out so well. What happened?
 - (d) (d) In looking back, what were the greatest obstacles? For you, for the participant? (Probe if necessary: Was the key factor in success or failure of the client, your training and skill resources for doing the job, practices and resources of GAIN?)
 4. Other issues to probe if not discussed in answer to the questions above: Describe what is working well or any difficulties regarding your efforts to provide:
 - (a) Child care for your client?
 - (b) Transportation?
 - (c) Identifying problems like spousal abuse, substance abuse, mental illness and referring clients to services?
 5. We understand that there are times when workers are called upon to impose sanctions on participants. Can a couple of you tell us what the sanctions consist of and the typical situations in which they might be imposed?
 6. Now we would like to know more about the occasions on which you have actually had to impose sanctions:
 - (a) Give an example of when you have had to invoke them?
 - (b) How did you decide?
 - (c) Do you feel that imposing sanctions was effective? Explain what happened.
 7. If you could make one recommendation to improve the effectiveness of GAIN, what would it be?
 8. Do you have any concerns or issues about your job and GAIN, which are important to you, but have not been covered in our discussion?

If time allows, ask the following questions:

-
1. How well do you think your training has prepared you for your job?
 2. Do you have a clear understanding of GAIN goals? How adequate are the resources to carry them out?
 3. National welfare reform as exemplified locally in CalWORKs and GAIN have dramatically moved away from an emphasis on welfare, dependency, and client problems to work and independence. Many of you have worked under the old system.
 - (a) How is this system similar and different from the old one?
 - (b) What is good and bad about this system compared to the old one?
 - (c) How has your work been affected by the change to the new system?
 - (d) Do you generally approve of the new direction?
 4. How do you receive information about changing policies and practices?
 - (a) What have been the problems involved?
 - (b) What do you think could be improved about the ways you receive information about changing policies and practices?
 5. How do you deal with or voice concerns about problems? (Probe if necessary: To your peers, your bosses?) Give an example of a time when you did this?
 6. Did you find the focus group interesting, enjoyable, a productive way of getting at the effectiveness of GAIN practices?

Questions Specific to GAIN Supervisors

1. First, let's go around the room to see what you do in an ordinary workday. We are interested less in your formal job description and what it says about what you do, than in what you actually do, your real practices, how you do them.
2. What are your work goals, or another way of asking this is, What do you try to achieve as a supervisor of Gain Service Workers?
3. What practices employed by GAIN Service Workers are most effective in helping participants in going from welfare-to-work? Give an example.
4. What do you think are the main obstacles that prevent GAIN Service workers from helping participants go from welfare-to-work? Give an example.
5. In general, which practices in moving people from welfare-to-work do you think need to be improved? (Again probe for examples, if the talk seems too general or abstract)

-
6. Probes if these issues are not discussed in the above questions: Describe what is working well or any difficulties regarding the efforts of workers in your unit with providing:
1. Providing information such as work requirements, time limits, etc.?
 2. Child care ?
 3. Transportation?
 4. Identifying problems like spousal abuse, substance abuse, mental illness?
 5. Referring clients to services?
 6. If you could make one recommendation to improve the effectiveness of GAIN, what would it be?
 7. Do you have any concerns or issues about your job and GAIN, which are important to you, but have not been covered in our discussion?

If time allows, ask the following questions:

1. How important do you think that sanctions are for moving people from welfare-to-work?
 - (a) How do you help the workers in your unit with decisions to impose sanctions? Give an example.
2. What do you see as the main obstacles preventing participants from moving ahead toward employment? Give an example. (Obstacles can cover anything: participant attitudes and behavior; GAIN goals and practices; communication and leadership within GAIN.)
 - (a) How do you think they can be helped to overcome them?
3. Do you feel that you have been given adequate training for your job?
4. Do you feel that you have been given a clear understanding of GAIN goals?
5. Do you think that you have been given adequate resources to carry them out?
6. National welfare reform as exemplified locally in CalWORKs and GAIN have dramatically moved away from an emphasis on welfare, dependency, and client problems to work and independence. Many of you have worked under the old system.
 - (a) How is this system similar and different from the old one?
 - (b) What is good and bad about this system compared to the old one?
 - (c) How has your work been affected by the change to the new system?
 - (d) How, in general, do you feel about the new system?
7. How do you receive information about changing policies and practices?
 - (a) What have been the problems involved?
 - (b) What do you think could be improved about the ways you receive information about changing policies and practices?

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8. How do you deal with or voice concerns about problems? Give an example of a time when you did this?
 9. Did you find the focus group interesting, enjoyable, or effective way of getting at practices that are working and not working?

Focus Group Questions: GAIN Participants

Introduction

1. Welcome. Our purpose in conducting this focus group is to help evaluate the effectiveness of [CalWORKs] and GAIN practices — to understand the ones that are working well and the ones that are in need of improvement. In doing this, we want to focus on your experiences with the Program—not how the program is supposed to work, BUT what on you personally find helpful and unhelpful about the way it actually works for you and your family.

We will be asking you to talk about such things as: What are your greatest needs with regard to participation in the program? How do you think the Program has worked so far in attempting to meet them? What do you think that the impact of your participation will be on your children and your family? And finally, we are interested in your ideas about how things could be improved.

We are very interested in your experiences as you begin the program, and we also want to understand how the Program works for you as time goes on. For this reason, we would e very interested in inviting you back to talk to us again once you have more experience in the program. [Should we be more specific about when?] We will be contacting you by phone in a few weeks to plan a more specific time to meet again.

2. Pass out a brief questionnaire including name, phone, age, level of education, age of children, major jobs you have had, your job aspiration. Did you receive support under the old AFDC program or some other welfare program? Have you participated in GAIN before?
3. Consent Form and why necessary including that we will ask them to participate in our.
4. The rules of the group: everyone gets to speak, nobody can dominate the conversation, and one person speaks at a time, great to disagree, but be courteous, maintain confidentiality of group responses.

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5. What we will do with the information. [Summarize the results of the focus groups and submit a report to the County as part of its evaluation of CalWORKs. Names of participants and tapes will be confidential and not given to the County. What you say here will have no effect on your evaluation or participation in DPSS, but it could be very helpful in making your opinions known and improving GAIN.]

Questions Specific to GAIN Participants

1. How do you feel about your recent Orientation session?
 - (a) What was helpful and not helpful?
 - (b) Is there anything about the program that is confusing?
 - (c) How did you feel about the staff?
 - (d) Did the Orientation session motivate you to get involved in the program?
 - (e) Did you get child care and transportation support for the Orientation?
 - (f) How satisfactory have these arrangement been for you?
2. If they have had their sessions with the SW:
 - (a) What are you feeling about your session with the GAIN Service Worker and signing a contract?
 - (b) Did you find any questions and requirements concerning the contract objectionable?
 - (c) Probe if not covered: We have heard that some participants find questions invasive and embarrassing, particularly those dealing with the need for mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence counseling. Is this true? How could access to these services be handled better?
 - (d) What in your opinion is the state requiring you to do?
 - (e) How do you feel about having to go to work under this program? Is this a good thing and an improvement over the old welfare program and its attitude and treatment of participants?
 - (f) What do you think about the time limits?
 - (g) What do you think of the consequences if you don't comply?
 - (h) Is there anything that you don't understand about the contract?
3. Now, we would like you to think about your decision to participate in the GAIN program and the impact of your involvement on you and your family:
 - (a) What was the deciding factor in persuading you to participate?
 - (b) What do you think might be the drawbacks to participation?
 - (c) Do you think that participation in the GAIN Program will help you reach your goals in life?
 - (d) What are your most urgent needs in achieving these goals?

-
- (e) What obstacles or barriers do you think there might be?
 - (f) So far, how have CalWORKs and GAIN helped you to satisfy these needs and overcome some of the obstacles? How do you think things will work out in the future?
 - (g) How do you think that participation might affect your children and your family? Do you think GAIN is children and family-friendly program?
4. Now, we would like to know more about how you feel about your contacts with CalWORKs Eligibility Workers, GAIN workers, and with the staff. In thinking back:
- (a) What were your first contacts with Eligibility Workers and GAIN staff like? What was helpful? What was annoying or off putting about any of it?
5. What do you know about GAIN services and their effectiveness in supporting participants in their search for work?
- Probe: child care, health care, transportation, and programs dealing with problems of substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health. Do you have enough information about these programs? In your opinion are they effective in meeting the needs of participants?
6. Some final questions:
- (a) Give a specific example of something particularly helpful that GAIN service workers or other staff did to encourage and assist you in going into the program?
 - (b) If you could make one recommendation to improve the effectiveness of GAIN in helping participants to understand and enter the program, what would it be?
7. Do you have any concerns about CalWORKs and GAIN, which we have not raised in our discussion?

APPENDIX E. CALWORKS EVALUATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The CalWORKs Evaluation Advisory Committee was established to ensure that the Urban Research Division's CalWORKs evaluation both reflects the concerns of diverse communities and to advise the evaluation team on research topics and methods.

CalWORKs Evaluation Advisory Committee Members

- Dr. Rosina M. Becerra, Department of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles
- Dr. Maria Teresa Hurtado, Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, Scripps College, Claremont
- Brian Kennedy, Claremont Institute, Sacramento
- Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey, School of Social Work, University of Southern California
- Beth Osthimer, San Fernando Valley Neighborhood Legal Aid Foundation
- Werner Schink, State of California, Department of Social Services, Sacramento
- Dr. Leonard Schneiderman, Los Angeles County Commission on Public Social Services, Committee on Research and Evaluation; Department of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles (Emeritus)

APPENDIX F. GLOSSARY

Term	Actual Title (if any)	Explanation
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children	Program started in the 1930s as Aid to Dependent Children, replaced under PRWORA with TANF
APP	Alternative Payment Program	An agency that handles payment for child care services. DPSS has contracts with ten APPs, all of which are also R&Rs (see R&R below).
CalWORKs	California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids program	California welfare-to-work program
CDMS	Caseload Data Management System	County case management system for GR and Medi-Cal
CDSS	California Department of Social Services	California state agency responsible for statewide implementation of welfare reform.
DCFS	Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services	
DCSS	Los Angeles County Department of Community and Senior Services	Handles services to seniors and refugees; contracting with DPSS to provide GAIN services to participants who speak neither English nor Spanish.
DHS	Los Angeles County Department of Health Services	
DMH	Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health	
DPSS	Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services	Los Angeles County agency delivering social services

Term	Actual Title (if any)	Explanation
EDD	Employment Development Department	Manages California's Unemployment Insurance (UI) program. Monitors employment at most establishments in the state.
ES	Eligibility Supervisor	Supervises EWs in a CalWORKs District Office.
EW	Eligibility Worker	Primary case worker assisting all CalWORKs recipients
GAIN	Greater Avenues for Independence	Los Angeles County welfare-to-work program
GEARS	GAIN Employment and Activity Reporting System	Computer system used for tracking GAIN participants
GR	General Relief	Cash assistance to indigent adults. Same as General Assistance.
GSS	GAIN Services Supervisor	Supervises GSWs in a CalWORKs District Office or GAIN Regional Office.
GSW	GAIN Services Worker	Primary case worker assisting GAIN participants
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act	Major federal job training program. Cooperates at the state level with the EDD.
LACOE	Los Angeles County Office of Education	State-funded organization providing educational services within the County.
LEADER	Los Angeles Eligibility, Automated Determination, Evaluation and Reporting	New system replacing CDMS, IBPS, and WCMIS; began operational testing on May 3, 1999 in one office
MAP	Maximum Aid Payment	Maximum cash grant size for a given family. The family receives a percentage of the MAP depending on other resources, income, and special circumstances.

Term	Actual Title (if any)	Explanation
MBSAC	Minimum Basic Standard of Adequate Care	Standard established by the CDSS as an absolute minimum required income for a family of a given size. Used as a maximum income level for establishing cash aid eligibility. Roughly 70% of the equivalent U.S. Bureau of the Census-established poverty threshold.
MDRC	Manpower Development Research Corporation	Private non-profit organization which specializes in the evaluation of work-related social programs, especially those which include training.
Medi-Cal		California's federally-funded Medicare program. Provides health insurance to poor families and individuals. All CalWORKs families are eligible for Medi-Cal assistance.
MEDS	Medi-Cal Eligibility Determination System	Computer system monitoring public assistance statewide.
PIC	Private Industry Council	Organizations established under the Job Training Partnership Act to promote employment
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PL 104-193)	Federal Welfare reform act
R&R	Resource and Referral Agency	Organization providing referrals for child care services. (See APP)
SDA	Service Delivery Area	Administrative area established under JTPA
SIP	Self-Initiated Program	Educational program pursued by GAIN participants on personal initiative
SSI	Supplemental Security Income	Federal cash aid program, mainly benefits permanently disabled adults.
TANF	Temporary Aid to Needy Families	Federal cash aid program with time limits and work requirements. It replaced AFDC in 1996.

Term	Actual Title (if any)	Explanation
UI	Unemployment Insurance	Cash assistance for unemployed workers. Benefits depend on past wages and employment; not all former workers are eligible.

APPENDIX G. ASSEMBLY BILL 1542 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REQUIREMENTS

CHAPTER 1.5. PERFORMANCE OUTCOME INCENTIVES MONITORING

10540. (a) It is the intent of the Legislature to implement Public Law 104-193 in such a manner as to do all of the following:

- (1) Reduce child poverty in the state.
- (2) Achieve the goals of Public Law 104-193, which include reducing dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; reducing out-of-wedlock births; and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.
- (3) Meet the requirements of federal law.

(b) It is further the intent of the Legislature to ensure that the implementation of Public Law 104-193 does not result in unanticipated outcomes that negatively affect child well-being, the demand for county general assistance, or the number of families affected by domestic violence.

10540.5. The department shall ensure that performance outcomes are monitored at the state and county levels in order to do all of the following:

- (a) Identify the extent to which the state and counties achieve the goals of Public Law 104-193.
- (b) Identify the extent to which unanticipated negative outcomes do or do not occur.
- (c) Meet the requirements of federal law.
- (d) Assist counties in tracking the effect of CalWORKs program implementation on aided families and on local communities.

(e) Assist counties, the Legislature, and state agencies in determining what adjustments are required in the program.

10541. The department shall consult with experts in monitoring and research, and representatives of counties, the Legislature, and appropriate state agencies in the development and implementation of the system of performance outcomes, which shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) Success of welfare-to-work, including the rate of movement to employment, earnings for CalWORKs recipients and those who have left the CalWORKs program, and job retention rates. This shall include the extent to which recipients have obtained unsubsidized employment in each of their years on aid.

(b) Rates of child support payment and collection.

(c) Child well-being, including entries into foster care, at-risk births, school achievement, child poverty, and child abuse reports.

(d) Changes in the demand for general assistance.

(e) Supply, demand, and utilization of support services by CalWORKs recipients, including child care, transportation, mental health services, and substance abuse treatment.

(f) The number of identified families affected by domestic violence.

10541.5. The department, in consultation with experts in research and program evaluation and representatives of counties, the Legislature, and appropriate state agencies, shall do both of the following, by March 1, 1998:

(a) Identify methods by which to collect data on the outcomes set forth in Section 10541, using, to the extent possible, data that is available and does not require the establishment of new data collection processes at the county level.

(b) Develop consistent data collection standards.

10541.7. Each county shall participate in monitoring performance outcomes by collecting and reporting data in the manner established

by Section 10541.

10542. (a) Each county shall, as part of its CalWORKs plan, identify outcomes to be tracked on the local level that are in addition to any required to be tracked statewide. These outcomes shall be identified through a collaborative process that includes all local agencies and stakeholders concerned with the implementation of the CalWORKs program and its effects on local communities. The outcomes identified may reflect goals for CalWORKs implementation established by the local community, possible negative outcomes the local community wishes to monitor, or both.

(b) The process of local identification of outcomes shall be designed to contribute to greater collaboration among county public and private agencies that serve current and former CalWORKs recipients. The outcomes identified shall be those that can be tracked in a cost-effective manner. To the extent counties identify the same outcomes, the department shall provide technical assistance to ensure consistency among the counties.

(c) The outcomes that each county plans to monitor shall be included in its county CalWORKs plan. The plan shall identify the outcomes, the data the county intends to collect to monitor the outcomes, and the method of data collection the county intends to use.

10543. (a) Within six months of CalWORKs implementation, each county, in conjunction with the department, shall determine a baseline for the data to be collected to meet both state and local need. The baseline shall be used in subsequent years to determine whether or not the county's outcomes are improving.

(b) If a county fails to meet outcomes required by federal law, the county, in consultation with the department, shall develop and implement a corrective action plan.

(c) If outcomes have not improved over the baseline, the county

and the department shall evaluate the reasons. To the extent the county and the department determine that county and state actions could positively influence the outcomes, they shall mutually develop and implement a corrective action plan.

(d) In both cases, the corrective action plan shall identify actions that shall be taken by the county and by appropriate state agencies.

APPENDIX H. WELFARE REFORM TIMELINE, 1996-2000

Date	Event
August 22, 1996	<p>Federal Welfare Reform Legislation Signed into Law (US)</p> <p>Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act signed into law.</p>
August 22, 1996	<p>SSI/SSP for Legal Immigrants (US)</p> <p>New applications for SSI/SSP benefits from non-exempt legal immigrants are denied based on citizenship status.</p>
September 22, 1996	<p>Food Stamps for Legal Immigrants (US)</p> <p>New applications for Food Stamps from non-exempt legal immigrants are denied based on citizenship status.</p>
October 17, 1996	<p>Citizenship Outreach Program (LA)</p> <p>Los Angeles County initiates a special mailer to 140,000 legal immigrant SSI recipients, informing them of the impact of Welfare Reform on their eligibility for benefits and encouraging them to pursue naturalization.</p>
November 26, 1996	<p>Approval of California State Plan (CA)</p> <p>The Federal government approves the California preliminary TANF block grant plan.</p>
December 16, 1996	<p>Citizenship Outreach Program (LA)</p> <p>Los Angeles County begins to screen all applicants for assistance to identify legal immigrants in order to inform them of the possible effects of Welfare Reform and to provide them with information on how to apply for citizenship.</p>
December 31, 1996	<p>Federal Five Year Clock Begins (US)</p> <p>The federal government begins counting time on aid against the five year lifetime limit.</p>
December 31, 1996	<p>Disability Related to Drug/Alcohol Abuse (US)</p> <p>Benefits terminated for those Social Security Disability Insurance and SSI/SSP beneficiaries whose disability was related to drug addiction or alcoholism.</p>

Date	Event
January 1, 1997	AFDC Grant Reduction (CA) AFDC grants reduced by 4.9% across the board in California.
February 1, 1997	SSA Notification Letter to Noncitizen Recipients of SSI (US) SSA begins to notify noncitizen recipients of the possible termination of SSI benefits.
March 1, 1997	Welfare Reform Hot line (LA) The toll free Welfare Reform Hot line number (1-888-3WELFAR) is up and working in Los Angeles County. This hot line provides updated information on program implementation, legislative issues and community advocacy meetings.
May 1, 1997	Teen Pregnancy Disincentive (US) With limited exceptions, never-married pregnant or parenting minors under 18 years of age must live with a parent, legal guardian or other adult relative, or in an adult supervised supportive living arrangement as a condition of AFDC eligibility.
August 5, 1997	Restoration of SSI Benefits for Most Legal Aliens (US) The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 signed into law on August 5, 1997, restored SSI benefits for most legal aliens that were impacted by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996.
August 11, 1997	State Legislation Enacted (CA) Governor signs legislation (AB 1542) to replacing AFDC with the CalWORKs and GAIN programs.
August 18, 1997	State Legislation on Substance Abuse Enacted (CA) Governor signs Assembly Bill 1260: Substance Abuse legislation that makes any person convicted after 12/31/97 of a drug-related felony permanently ineligible for aid.
September 1, 1997	Food Stamps for Legal Immigrants Non-exempt legal immigrants currently receiving Food Stamps benefits lose these benefits. The Governor approved AB 1576 which creates a special State Food Stamp program effective this date for non-disabled adults 65 years or older and for minors under 18 years old.

Date	Event
September 1, 1997	<p>Food Stamps Work Requirement</p> <p>New Food Stamps work requirement (which limits food stamps benefits for able-bodied adults between 18 and 50, without dependent children, to three months in three years, except for persons in work, training or Workfare) will be implemented. People subject to this requirement, who also receive General Relief, will be able to maintain their food stamps by continuing to participate in the County's General Relief Workfare program. Los Angeles County will offer Workfare to the other food stamps recipients subject to this work requirement to enable them to retain their food stamps.</p>
September 1, 1997	<p>Maximum Family Grant</p> <p>Families will not receive cash assistance for children born after implementation of this provision, if they have been continuously on aid for 10 months prior. However, the child will be eligible for Medi-Cal and Food Stamps. Some of the exemptions include children conceived as a result of rape, incest and certain failed contraceptive methods.</p>
September 2, 1997	<p>Workgroups Meetings</p> <p>Welfare Reform Implementation Workgroups begin meeting.</p>
September 10, 1997	<p>State's Planning Allocation Letter</p> <p>Issuance by State of a planning allocation and county plan instructions 30 days after enactment of AB 1542.</p>
September 30, 1997 (Federal Fiscal Year End)	<p>TANF Work Participation Rates (CA)</p> <p>California must ensure that 25% of all families and 75% of two-parent families meet welfare-to-work participation requirements or face penalties. Having earned a caseload reduction credit, California was given a reduced target to meet.</p>
January 1, 1998	<p>CalWORKs Grant Computation</p> <p>CalWORKs changes the method for computing earned income. Net earned income is determined by deducting the first \$225 of the gross plus 50% of the remainder. The net income is deducted from the Maximum Aid Payment. A separate child care provider payment is required.</p>

Date	Event
January 1, 1998	<p>Five Year Clock Starts</p> <p>California begins counting time on aid against the <i>state</i> five year lifetime limit. State funds will be used to pay for aided persons who reach the federal limit before they reach the state limit. With few exceptions, there will only be discrepancies between the state and federal time limits for those on aid before January 1, 1998.</p>
January 10, 1998	<p>Submission of County Plan</p> <p>County to submit plan for implementation of CalWORKs within four months of the issuance of the planning allocation letter.</p>
February 3, 1998	<p>Budget and Staffing Plan, Facilities (part 1) Plan</p> <p>Approved by Board of Supervisors</p>
February 9, 1998	<p>State Certification of County Plan</p> <p>CDSS has 30 days to either certify the plan or notify the County that the plan is not complete or consistent with statutory requirements.</p>
February 22, 1998	<p>SSI/SSP for Children</p> <p>Deadline for SSI reassessment for disabled children. Disability criteria changed. Behavior impairments such as Attention Deficit Disorder will not be considered a disabling condition. This deadline was extended from 8/22/97 to 2/22/98.</p>
March 10, 1998	<p>Facilities (part 2) Plan</p> <p>Approved by Board of Supervisors</p>
March 31, 1998	<p>Domestic Violence, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse supportive services Plans (LA)</p> <p>Approved by Board of Supervisors</p>
April 1, 1998	<p>CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work Launched in Los Angeles County (LA)</p> <p>County began enrolling all new non-exempt applicants for aid into the welfare-to-work program. Welfare-to-work plans signed on or after April 1 start the 18/24 month time limit.</p>
April 14, 1998	<p>Child Care Plan and Performance Monitoring Plan</p> <p>Approved by Board of Supervisors</p>

Date	Event
May 12, 1998	Child Care Capacity Building Plan Approved by Board of Supervisors
June 9, 1998	Welfare-to-Work Grant Plan, and Post-Employment Services Plan Approved by Board of Supervisors
June 16, 1998	Communication Plan Approved by Board of Supervisors
September 30, 1998 (Federal Fiscal Year End)	TANF Work Participation Rates (CA) California must ensure that 30% of all families and 75% of two-parent families meet welfare-to-work participation requirements or face penalties. California failed to meet the requirement for two-parent families. Having earned a caseload reduction credit, California was given a reduced target to meet.
November 1, 1998	CalWORKs Grant Increase (CA) The state restored the 4.9% previously cut, and added a 2.84% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase.
January 1, 1999	Enrollment of Recipients into Welfare-to-Work Program County must enroll all non-exempt CalWORKs recipients in welfare-to-work services by the end of 1998.
June 15, 1999	Transportation Plan Approved by Board of Supervisors.
July 1, 1999	CalWORKs COLA Increase (CA) CalWORKs grants scheduled for 2.36% COLA increase.
Later in 1999	Diversion, Transportation, and Job Creation Plans Not yet submitted to Board of Supervisors.
September 30, 1999 (Federal Fiscal Year End)	TANF Work Participation Rates (CA) California must ensure that 35% of all families and 90% of two-parent families meet welfare-to-work participation requirements or face penalties.

Date	Event
April 1, 2000	<p>First Recipients Exceed Two Year Limit</p> <p>Some non-exempt adults who have been on aid continuously since April 1, 1998, are no longer eligible for cash aid. If they do not meet employment requirements, they will be required to participate in community service employment.</p>
September 30, 2000 (Federal Fiscal Year End,)	<p>TANF Work Participation Rates (CA)</p> <p>California must ensure that 40% of all families and 90% of two-parent families meet welfare-to-work participation requirements or face penalties.</p>
September 30, 2001 (Federal Fiscal Year End)	<p>TANF Work Participation Rates (CA)</p> <p>California must ensure that 45% of all families and 90% of two-parent families meet welfare-to-work participation requirements or face penalties.</p>
September 30, 2002 (Federal Fiscal Year End) and all subsequent years	<p>TANF Work Participation Rates (CA)</p> <p>California must ensure that 50% of all families and 90% of two-parent families meet welfare-to-work participation requirements or face penalties.</p>
April 1, 2003	<p>First Recipients Exceed Five Year Limit</p> <p>Non-exempt aided adults who have been on aid continuously since April 1, 1998 are no longer eligible for aid. No more than 20% of the current <i>federally-funded</i> caseload can be exempted from this time limit. (California may elect to support as many additional time-expired participants as it chooses with state funds.)</p>

APPENDIX I. CASELOAD DEMOGRAPHICS, APRIL 1999

Table 0-7. CalWORKs Caseload Characteristics, April 1999

	CalWORKs-FG (one-parent)	CalWORKs-U (two-parent)	Total
Cases aided	192,186	38,584	230,770
Persons aided	507,464	141,471	648,935
Cases with no aided adults	68,968	11,001	79,969
Aided children on these cases	134,684	26,634	161,318
Age in years of aided persons:			
Under 1	17,554	4,191	21,745
1 – 2	45,692	11,743	57,435
3 – 5	78,241	19,812	98,053
6 – 12	162,025	38,642	200,667
13 – 15	47,068	11,873	58,941
16 – 17	26,588	7,017	33,605
18	5,791	1,376	7,167
19	3,312	432	3,744
20	3,871	507	4,378
21 – 59	116,604	45,384	161,988
60 – 65	595	440	1,035
Over 65	123	54	177
Total aided persons	507,464	141,471	648,935
Average age of aided adults (years)	33	34	35

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Table 0-7. CalWORKs Caseload Characteristics, April 1999 (Continued)

		CalWORKs-FG	CalWORKs-U	Total
		(one-parent)	(two-parent)	
Sex of aided persons:				
Adults				
Male		8,976	23,394	32,370
Female		121,814	24,870	146,684
Children				
Male		188,636	47,049	235,685
Female		188,038	46,158	234,196
Total aided persons		507,464	141,471	648,935
Citizenship status of aided persons:				
Citizens		471,856	103,660	575,516
Legal immigrants		35,608	37,811	73,419
Undocumented immigrants		0	0	0
Total aided persons		507,464	141,471	648,935
Primary Language				
Armenian	Cases	2,193	4,922	7,115
	Persons	5,753	18,513	24,266
Cambodian	Cases	2,836	695	3,531
	Persons	10,002	3,492	13,494
Chinese	Cases	912	976	1,888
	Persons	2,614	4,366	6,980
English	Cases	125,485	10,680	136,165
	Persons	341,730	41,924	383,654
Farsi	Cases	175	361	536
	Persons	450	1,404	1,854
Korean	Cases	158	48	206

	Persons	372	177	549
Russian	Cases	380	512	892
	Persons	818	1,773	2,591

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Table 0-7. CalWORKs Caseload Characteristics, April 1999 (Continued)

		CalWORKs-FG	CalWORKs-U	Total
		(one-parent)	(two-parent)	
Primary Language (Continued)				
Spanish	Cases	57,745	17,864	75,609
	Persons	139,282	59,182	198,464
Vietnamese	Cases	2,023	2,363	4,386
	Persons	5,650	9,915	15,565
Other	Cases	279	163	442
	Persons	793	725	1,518
Total aided	Cases	192,186	38,584	230,770
	Persons	507,464	141,471	648,935
Ethnic Origin				
Asian	Cases	9,807	5,254	15,061
	Persons	27,313	21,823	49,136
Black	Cases	62,020	1,926	63,946
	Persons	161,774	6,690	168,464
Hispanic	Cases	101,126	22,919	124,045
	Persons	263,090	79,361	342,451
White	Cases	18,812	8,407	27,219
	Persons	54,508	33,422	87,930
Other	Cases	421	78	499
	Persons	779	175	954
Total aided	Cases	192,186	38,584	230,770
	Persons	507,464	141,471	648,935

Source: CalWORKs Caseload Characteristics, April 1999, Los Angeles County Totals, Department of Public Social Services

Note: Case counts are based on the primary language/ethnicity of the head of household. Person language counts reflect the number of aided persons on these cases. Person ethnic counts are based on the ethnicity of the individual. Persons of different ethnicity within the same case will be counted in different ethnic categories. All person counts are for *aided* persons. Asian ethnicity counts include Filipinos and Pacific Islanders.

APPENDIX J. POVERTY AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Table 0-8. Poverty and Aid Thresholds

	1 Parent, 2 Children	2 Parents, 2 Children
California Minimum Wage (Hourly)	\$5.75	\$5.75
Max. Cash Grant (Monthly) ¹	\$611.00	\$728.00
Max. Earnings under CalWORKs ²	\$1,447.00	\$1,682.00
Max. Eligible Monthly Income (MBSAC) ³	\$775.00	\$920.00
Max. Food Stamps Allotment (Monthly) ⁴	\$329.00	\$419.00
Max. Hourly Wage under Food Stamps	\$10.67	\$11.76
Max. Monthly Earnings under Food Stamps	\$1479.00	\$1783.00
Max. Wage under CalWORKs (Hourly) ⁵	\$10.44	\$11.08
Poverty Threshold (Annual)	\$13,133.00	\$16,530.00
Poverty Wage (Hourly) ⁶	\$7.89	\$9.08
Minimum Wage, as % of Poverty Wage ⁷	73%	58%

Source: URD calculations from data provided by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the Department of Public Social Services

¹ This is the Maximum Aid Payment (MAP) this family would normally receive assuming no earnings or special circumstances. This is a “non-exempt” grant.

² California does not reduce aid by \$1 for every \$1 earned. Instead, up to \$225 is disregarded, and only half of the remaining earnings count against the grant. As family earnings approach this threshold, the cash grant decreases to \$0.

³ To successfully apply for CalWORKs, a family with no wage earners must have a monthly income below the Minimum Basic Standard of Adequate Care (MBSAC). A number of other limitations, financial and otherwise, apply.

⁴ This is the maximum food stamp allotment for this family assuming no earnings and no special circumstances. The allotment decreases with increasing income.

⁵ This is the monthly amount multiplied by 12 months, divided by 52 weeks multiplied by 32 or 35 hours, as appropriate for the family type.

Continued on next page

Table 0-8. Poverty and Aid Thresholds (Continued)

⁶ Assuming no other income, a wage earner would have to exceed this hourly wage in order to bring her family above the poverty line. This is calculated by dividing the annual poverty threshold by 52 weeks and dividing the result by the weekly hours required by federal and state law for nonexempt cash aid recipients: 32 hours per week for a single aided parent, and 35 hours per week for two-parent families.

⁷ The poverty wage divided by the California minimum wage.

ENDNOTES

¹ In Appendix G we present an excerpt from AB1542 that includes a more complete description of the intent of the legislature.

² Department of Public Social Services. 1998. "DPSS Launches CalWORKs On April 1." http://dpss.la.co.ca.us/press_releases.c/980522pr_calworks_launches.htm. Accessed on May 20, Last Updated May 20, 1998.

³ We are not unique in using the term *promising practices*. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor sponsored a set of "Promising Practices National Conferences" during late 1998 and early 1999, for instance. Summaries of two of those conferences are now available at <HTTP://www.emprisegroup.net/TANF>. Another example is the Welfare Information Network's web site, which has an area dedicated to *promising practices*: <HTTP://www.welfareinfo.org/bestprac.htm>.

⁴ Wilson, William Julius. 1987. *The Truly Disadvantaged*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

⁵ Administration for Children and Families. 1996. "Remarks By President Clinton At The Welfare Reform Bill Signing." <HTTP://www.acf.dhhs.gov/822potus.htm>. Accessed on January 1, Last Updated Thursday, August 22, 1996.

⁶ Administration for Children and Families. 1996. "Fact Sheet: State Welfare Demonstrations." <HTTP://www.acf.dhhs.gov/waivers.htm>. Accessed on January 1, Last Updated Monday, October 7, 1996.

⁷ Administration for Children and Families. 1996. “Fact Sheet: State Welfare Demonstrations.” *HTTP://www.acf.dhhs.gov/waivers.htm*. Accessed on January 1, Last Updated Monday, October 7, 1996.

⁸ The first waiver created the “Work Pays Demonstration Project.” The demonstration added incentives to keep teen parents in school; allowed AFDC families to hold more assets (in dollar value) and savings than had previously been the case; and allowed access to Medi-Cal and other services for low-income parents who qualified for but did not request AFDC cash assistance. This waiver was granted in 1994. The second waiver, “AFDC and Food Stamp Compatibility Demonstration Project,” adjusted rules in each of the two programs—AFDC and Food Stamps—regarding the calculation of income and assets for the purposes of determining eligibility and benefit levels. The third waiver, “California's Incentives to Self-Sufficiency Project,” modified the Work Pays Demonstration Project to provide transitional child care to some families leaving aid; strengthen fraud penalties; and expand the Community Work Experience Program. The fourth waiver, the “School Attendance Demonstration Project,” applied only to teenage children in AFDC households in San Diego County. The project required affected teens to either attend school or else participate in job search and training. The second, third, and fourth waivers were approved in 1995. The fifth waiver amended the “Assistance Payments Demonstration Project (APDP),” which had originally been approved in 1992. The amendment reduced benefits to welfare recipients, and added new work incentives. HHS modified the requested waiver, insisting on exemptions from reductions for the disabled and others who could not be expected to work, and revoking California’s authority to provide lower benefits to new residents. The sixth

waiver amended the Work Pays Demonstration Project to add a “Maximum Family Grant” (MFG) provision. The MFG prevented families from receiving cash aid increases for children conceived while the family was receiving aid. It did not affect allocations of other kinds of assistance, such as Medi-Cal or Food Stamps. The seventh waiver request was another modification of the Work Pays Demonstration Project. It aimed to encourage minor parents to live with relatives by disregarding the income of co-resident grandparents. The fifth, sixth, and seventh waiver requests were approved in 1996. Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1996. “HHS Approves Seventh California Welfare Waiver.”

<http://www.keepinformd.com/HHS/PR/1996/10/961003b.html>. Accessed on June 8, Last Updated October 3.

Administration for Children and Families. 1996. “Fact Sheet: State Welfare Demonstrations.” *<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/waivers.htm>*. Accessed on January 1, Last Updated Monday, October 7, 1996.

⁹ Zedlewski, Sheila R., Pamela A. Holcomb, and Amy-Ellen Duke. 1998. “Cash assistance in transition: the story of 13 states.” Urban Institute, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰ Zedlewski, Sheila R., Pamela A. Holcomb, and Amy-Ellen Duke. 1998. “Cash assistance in transition: the story of 13 states.” Urban Institute, Washington, D.C.

¹¹ In general, AB1542 makes the first \$225 of earned income and 50% of earned income beyond that exempt from being counted as income for the purposes of family grant calculation. If a family receives unearned disability-based income, the disability-based income counts against the “first \$225” exemption. If a family received \$125 in unearned disability-based income, for example, and received \$500 in earned income,

then the \$125 in unearned income and the first \$100 of earned income would be totally exempt. Of the remaining \$400 of earned income, \$200 would be exempt.

¹² No more than 20% of the average annual caseload funded by the federal government can be exempted from the five-year lifetime limit. California can choose to aid more adults who have passed the five-year limit, but only by expending state funds.

¹³ All caseload statistics have been rounded to the nearest 1,000.

¹⁴ Many of the refugees settled locally are Vietnamese and other Southeast Asians who fled their native countries with little or no resources and no transportable skills. Los Angeles is also home to many refugees from the former Soviet Union, Armenia, and Central America.

¹⁵ Department of Public Social Services. 1999. "CalWORKs Implementation Plans." http://dpss.co.la.ca.us/calworks.c/state_plan_target_dates.htm. Accessed on May 25, Last Updated June 9, 1999.

¹⁶ DPSS subsequently created fourteen ongoing public planning workgroups to maintain the community connections established with these early forums.

¹⁷ United States General Accounting Office. 1997. "Social service privatization: expansion poses challenges in ensuring accountability for program results." United States General Accounting Office, Health, Education, and Human Services Division, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ While we do not wish to promulgate stereotypes of "welfare mothers", the vast majority of adult aid recipients are women. Our description of Louise and her family is based partly on DPSS statistics, partly on our survey interviews and focus groups with CalWORKs recipients and GAIN participants, and partly on the findings of Edin and

Lein. Edin, Kathryn and Laura Lein. 1997. *Making Ends Meet : How Single Mothers Survive Welfare And Low-Wage Work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

¹⁹ DPSS requires a minimum of three weeks, although state law allows counties to require up to four weeks.

²⁰ She would be “sanctioned.” The first time she is sanctioned, she can meet with a GSW to avoid loss of her benefits. The second time, she loses benefits for three months, and the third time, she loses benefits for six months. She can appeal the sanction, and has ten days to do so once she is notified that it is “pending.” This means that there may be a delay of a month or more from the initial “discovery” of non-compliance by a GSW to the actual loss of benefits. As long as she continues supplying CA-7 forms to DPSS and her family remains otherwise eligible, only “her part” of the grant is cut. Of course, any cut in the grant means a decrease in resources available to all members of the family, including children.

²¹ In general, the orientation takes a full day, but we have heard of abbreviated sessions or occasions in which the orientation session takes place on one day with the Appraisal—normally the second part of the day—taking place later.

²² Based on a tabulation of persons receiving cash aid (codes 30, 32, 33, and 35) in Los Angeles County during October 1998. From MEDS (Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System).

²³ Only nine new applicants reported never having been on public assistance in the past. By “new”, we mean “not currently receiving assistance.”

²⁴ Intake Eligibility Workers began using the eight-question “Screening for Substance Abuse and Mental Health” (also known as the “GN 6140”) during April 1999. Screening during Intake helps ensure that potential substance abuse and mental health problems are identified quickly. When the Intake worker does identify problems, through the screening instrument or otherwise, the applicant is immediately referred to GAIN for referral to Clinical Assessment.

²⁵ Department of Public Social Services. 1998. “What is GAIN?” <http://dpss.co.la.ca.us/gain/main.html>. Accessed on March 10, Last Updated August 24.

²⁶ Kathryn and Laura Lein. 1997. *Making Ends Meet : How Single Mothers Survive Welfare And Low-Wage Work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

²⁷ Kathryn and Laura Lein. 1997. *Making Ends Meet : How Single Mothers Survive Welfare And Low-Wage Work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

²⁸ In the research literature, when analysts and welfare recipients are asked to list the barriers that prevent them from becoming employed, lack of transportation ranks between third and fifth. Ong, Paul. 1998. “An Agenda for Research, Planning and Evaluation.” Pp. 20-26 in *Getting Welfare Recipients to Work: Transportation and Welfare Reform* prepared by Blumenberg, Evelyn, Steven Moga, and Paul M. Ong. Conference Proceedings, Los Angeles.

²⁹ Zedlewski, Sheila R., Pamela A. Holcomb, and Amy-Ellen Duke. 1998. “Cash assistance in transition: the story of 13 states.” Urban Institute, Washington, D.C.

³⁰ Zellman, Gail L., Jacob Alex Klerman, Elaine Reardon, Donna Farley, Nicole Humphrey, Tammi Chun, and Paul Steinberg. 1999. “Welfare Reform in California:

State and County Implementation of CalWORKs in the First Year.” RAND, Santa Monica, CA.

³¹ In our survey, we asked the question “Does [the bus] run on the hours you need it?” without attempting to define “need.” We assumed, but did not attempt to establish, that our respondents interpreted hours of “need” to include primarily the times when the respondent would need to travel to a child care provider, to work, to job interviews, or to supermarkets. Though not an exact measure of, for instance, transportation problems as a barrier to work, we believe it does give a rough indication.

³² These will be specially designated areas, appropriately furnished, for parents to watch their children while waiting to be seen by DPSS staff.

³³ Potential participants who can certify that they are working the required number of hours are not required to attend the GAIN Orientation. From GAIN’s perspective, however, employed participants still benefit from knowledge about the services GAIN offers and especially the availability of Post-Employment Services. For those who work only part time and who are not otherwise exempt, Orientation and participation in GAIN remain mandatory.

³⁴ Participants are encouraged in the orientation to develop their own personal goals. These participants, however, felt discouraged by the difference between what they thought was realistic for themselves, and the “aim high” tone of the orientation.

³⁵ Handler, Joel F. and Yeheskel Hasenfeld. 1997. *We the Poor People: Work, Poverty, and Welfare*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

³⁶ The one-year exemption can only be used once for each family; with subsequent births, a parent can only be exempted for up to six months.

³⁷ The frustration of this participant with fixed GAIN policies brings up the distinction in complex organizations between rules-based and judgment-based decision-making. We thank Dr. Leonard Schneiderman for pointing out these two modalities of decision-making in complex organizations.

³⁸ From section 11320.1 of the Welfare and Institutions Code.

³⁹ The literacy test became part of the GAIN Orientation starting on May 15, 1999, in GAIN Regional Offices, and on June 14, 1999, in CalWORKs District Offices.

⁴⁰ Flaming, Daniel, Mark Drayse, and Peter Force. 1999. *On the Edge: A Progress Report on Welfare to Work in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Economic Roundtable.

⁴¹ Availability of services depends on the findings from a clinical assessment.

⁴² DPSS held a conference in early 1999 as part of an effort to improve the delivery of supportive services. The conference “Implementing CalWORKs: Creating a Seamless System of Supportive Services Moving from Welfare to Work,” subtitled “An Interactive Forum for Los Angeles County Administrators, Line Staff and Service Providers on Welfare Reform and Supportive Services”, was held on March 11, 1999.

⁴³ Prior to the launching of CalWORKs welfare-to-work, DPSS did not pay child care expenses through direct payments to providers or reimbursements to aid recipients. Instead, DPSS employed “income disregards.” When an aid recipient was employed and had earned income, part of that earned income would be deducted from the family grant. The income disregard functioned like an income tax exemption, reducing the amount of income that would be considered when calculating the family grant.

⁴⁴ Pinkus, Susan. 1999. “Child Care in California.” in *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, June 20. Los Angeles, CA.

⁴⁵ It is DPSS policy to issue child care payments only after services have been provided. However, on an exceptional basis, advance payments may be issued in DPSS offices.

⁴⁶ Advance payments can be made to the provider, if the provider charges all clients in the same manner.

⁴⁷ DPSS has been negotiating with the R&R/APPs to handle these payments.

⁴⁸ According to DPSS, space limitations are the main barrier to having clinical assessors in every office.

⁴⁹ Corbett, Thomas. 1994. "Changing the Culture of Welfare." Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, Madison:
gopher://gopher.ssc.wisc.edu:70/00/irpgopher/publications/focus/16.2.a/changing.gfr. Accessed on June 3, Last Updated

⁵⁰ Weissman, Evan. 1997. *Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. (p. 7)

⁵¹ Zellman, Gail L., Jacob Alex Klerman, Elaine Reardon, Donna Farley, Nicole Humphrey, Tammi Chun, and Paul Steinberg. 1999. "Welfare Reform in California: State and County Implementation of CalWORKs in the First Year." RAND, Santa Monica, CA. (p. 78)

⁵² Corbett, Thomas. 1994. "Changing the Culture of Welfare." Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, Madison:
gopher://gopher.ssc.wisc.edu:70/00/irpgopher/publications/focus/16.2.a/changing.gfr. Accessed on June 3, Last Updated

⁵³ Weissman, Evan. 1997. *Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. (p. 8)

⁵⁴ Weissman, Evan. 1997. *Changing to a Work First Strategy: Lessons from Los Angeles County's GAIN Program for Welfare Recipients*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. (p. 8)

⁵⁵ Corbett, Thomas. 1994. "Changing the Culture of Welfare." Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, Madison:
gopher://gopher.ssc.wisc.edu:70/00/irp/gopher/publications/focus/16.2.a/changing.gfr. Accessed on June 3, Last Updated

⁵⁶ As an illustration of this view, in one of our focus groups a GSW remarked that "our voices aren't being heard" by the DPSS administration on implementation issues. Another GSW in the group responded by saying "You know our administration here in the office, you know, they're very helpful. They understand." A third GSW qualified this: "But they can only do so much."

⁵⁷ All aided adults were classified on a number of criteria, assigned one code from a hierarchy of codes, and then called in for mandatory participation in GAIN based on their place in the hierarchy. In addition, adult aid recipients could voluntarily place themselves in GAIN. The categories also changed over time, as did the relative priorities of the categories so there is no easy way to describe the population of pre-CalWORKs GAIN participants.

⁵⁸ A fourth area of concern that was present but much less clearly articulated was status differences between the two jobs. Though EWs appeared to resent it, both recognized the GSW position as one of higher status than EW.

⁵⁹ This does not necessarily mean that EWs did not enjoy helping people. It is possible that EWs simply did not feel that their jobs gave them the opportunity to help people. The moral position that it is better to give a “hand up” than a hand-out is deeply engrained in American culture. This power of this position has been strengthened by research that purports to find that welfare debilitates poor people rather than helping them. On one hand, eligibility workers are the distributors of hand-outs. On the other hand, the imperative to determine eligibility precisely puts them in an antagonistic relationship with welfare recipients who, we assume, would like to maximize the benefits they receive. Furthermore, the GSW position, though it does entail some rule enforcement (e.g., the GSW must sanction the non-compliant participant), the GSW exists to help move participants move into the moral high ground by supporting themselves through employment. It is simply easier for the GSW to feel like he or she is helping people than it is for the EW, both for philosophical reasons and because of their respective job duties.

⁶⁰ We note, however, that there is considerable overlap between response categories. If EWs had a smaller caseload (an EW concern), they would be able to spend more time with each recipient (a GSW concern), and they would probably have less paperwork to do (another EW concern). In other words, the differences between EW and GSW dislikes could be smaller than we indicate here.

⁶¹ Brady, Henry E. and Barbara West Snow. 1996. "Data Systems and Statistical Requirements for the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996." University of California Data Archive and Technical Assistance (UC DATA): http://ucdata.berkeley.edu/new_web/pubs/NAS1196.html. Accessed on December 24, Last Updated December 10, 1996.

⁶² Participants can continue to receive Post-Employment Services for up to one year after ceasing to receive cash aid.

⁶³ Public Interest Breakthroughs. 1998. "California Welfare Reform Impact Assessment Project Report." Public Interest Breakthroughs, Vienna, VA.

⁶⁴ The law directed the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to issue guidelines within thirty days of the passage of the law, and counties were required to submit plans within four months after the issuance of guidelines. Implementation was to take place on January 1, 1998, or, if the plan was submitted after January 1, 1998, upon submission of the plan.

⁶⁵ The large variation in estimates given for mental health and substance abuse problems are due in part to the varying definitions used in research studies. The low end of the range includes only the most severe cases. The estimates are from: Johnson, Amy and Alicia Meckstroth. 1998. "Ancillary Services to Support Welfare to Work." Mathematica Policy Institute, Princeton, N.J.

⁶⁶ We were informed after fielding the survey that transportation assistance is *not* provided to employed CalWORKs recipients or GAIN participants. Assistance is only available for those seeking a job or participating in another welfare-to-work activity.